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**MAKING THE REVOLUTION--MAYBE...DERADICALIZATION AND STALINISM
IN THE AMERICAN COMMUNIST PARTY, 1928-1938**

City University of New York

Ph.D. 1983

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MAKING THE REVOLUTION--MAYBE...
DERADICALIZATION AND STALINISM IN THE AMERICAN
COMMUNIST PARTY, 1928-1938

by

Joseph M. Kling

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Political Science in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, the City University of New York.

1983

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty
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Sept 30-1983
date

Robert Engle
Chairman of Examining Committee

Sept. 30, 1983
date

Thomas D. Karris
Executive Officer

Professor Marshall Berman (C)

Professor Bernard E. Brown (L)

Professor Ivo Duchacek

Professor Irving L. Markovitz (Q)
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

MAKING THE REVOLUTION---MAYBE...
DERADICALIZATION AND STALINISM IN THE AMERICAN
COMMUNIST PARTY, 1928-1938

by

Joseph M. Kling

Adviser: Professor Robert Engler

Reader: Professor Bernard E. Brown

The specific aim of this dissertation is to resolve the question of whether the American Communist party, at some point during the nineteen-thirties, became a reformist, or 'deradicalized' political movement. The method of the study will be to develop and systematically apply a model of radicalism to the behavior of the Party from 1928 to 1938. My conclusion is that, by the criteria of the suggested model, the Party, after the re-election of Roosevelt in 1936, did, indeed, become deradicalized.

The methodology is two-fold. First, working within the Marxist tradition, a model is proposed of a set of ideas which might reasonably be said to govern the behavior of a contemporary radical movement. The sources of the paradigm are seminal analysts and critics of the concept of radicalism, ranging from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg and Gramsci on the one hand, to Eduard Bernstein and Roberto Michels on the other.

The basic premise of the analysis is that radicalism is defined by the extent to which an oppositionist movement explicitly projects a class-conflict theory of society and politics as background to its day-to-day activities. Such open and conscious projection of radical ideas I refer to as 'ideological struggle'. On the simplest level, what I mean by ideological struggle is the public expression and open statement of radical assumptions and values as the context of immediate political choice. It follows that a radical movement may limit its immediate practice to support for programs of reform. It may not, however, withdraw from public view the concepts which place it into opposition to capitalism in the first place.

The second part of the methodology involves applying the suggested definition of radical practice to the American Communists in the 1930's. I will argue that if the Party became deradicalized, this was not because it gave support to legislative reform, or postponed the demand for socialism. It was because the Communists refused to ground their immediate strategies in a larger program of ideological articulation outside the formal New Deal coalition.

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PART ONE

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF RADICAL ACTIVISM: WITH
SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE NOTION OF IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE
IN MARXIST THEORIES OF REVOLUTION AND CHANGE

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: REFORM OR REVOLUTION? CONCEPTUAL AMBIGUITIES IN THE STUDY OF MOVEMENTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

What is a radical political movement? What particular strategies, if any, under what sorts of conditions, will be most effective in bringing about a transition from capitalism to socialism? What should the stance of a working class party be in relation to the capture of state power? Can workers attain economic security and meaningful political impact if they agree to work within the constitutional limits of a capitalist order?

In varying forms, such questions have confronted all those concerned with the character of social conflict. Indeed, opposing concepts and strategies as to how best control and redirect the political and economic dislocations associated with modernity emerge at the very beginnings of the industrial era. E. J. Hobsbawm traces the roots of this debate back to the French Revolution itself, before a working class, and a working class politics, had even developed. It was expressed in the political opposition of the Gironde, the moderates, and the Jacobins, the radicals. "Time and again we shall see the moderate middle-class reformers mobilizing the masses against die-hard resistance or counter-revolution," Hobsbawm writes.

We shall see the masses pushing beyond the moderates' aims to their own social revolutions, and the moderates in turn splitting into a conservative group..., and a left-wing group determined to pursue the rest of the as yet unachieved moderate aims...

The peculiarity of the French Revolution is that one section of the liberal middle-class was prepared to remain revolutionary up to and indeed beyond the brink of anti-bourgeois revolution: these were the Jacobins, whose name came to stand for 'radical revolution' everywhere...

...The Gironde, on the other hand, was afraid of the political consequences of the combination of mass revolution and war which they unleashed...¹

The 'reform-revolution' question, then, predates the rise of an industrial proletariat, and seems to be inherent in the political responses engendered by the very process of modernization.

By the time of the first articulations of a coherent socialist politics, in the 1830's and 1840's, the terms of the debate had been revised to keep up with the changing character of the European social structure. Utopian theorists, like Fourier and Owen, developed one set of theoretical understandings for dealing with the problems of the new society. Their stance became linked to the modern concept of 'reform'. On the other hand, proponents of conspiracy, and of the legitimacy of violence, like Buonaratti and Blanqui, developed notions which became attached to the idea of radicalism and revolutionary overthrow.²

In the 1890's, with the electoral success of the German Social-Democracy, and the failure of a revolutionary class consciousness to take hold in the minds of the European proletariat, the issue became transformed once again. Now the problem was, how to maintain a revolutionary movement and direction in face of both an entrenched and expanding capitalism, and stable, liberal-democratic, political institutions. The lists of these debates were entered by such theorists as Eduard Bernstein and the 'economists' on one side, and V. I. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg on the other. The first group argued that parliamentarism, the working-class franchise, and the massive wealth made possible by modern methods of

production, rendered revolutionary programs and strategies for change obsolete. Socialism would come through constitutional agitation alone. The second argued that economic exploitation, inherent in the system of private profit, could never be overcome except by direct and massive confrontation, in one form or another, with the capitalist state. In the pages to follow, I shall have reason to make a close and detailed analysis of some of the concepts involved in these particular debates.

In the post-Stalin era, the era of polycentrism and Euro-communism, still another variant of the question appeared. For, in the 1970's, the political programs of the Spanish, Italian, and French Communist parties came to reject the dictatorship of the proletariat, to call for independence from Moscow, and to advocate permanent alliances, within a pluralist democratic framework, with liberals and socialists. Analysts began to puzzle over the meaning of these changes. "Like most of those who come to grips with the issue of working class politics," wrote Donald Blackmer and Sidney Tarrow,

we have been fascinated--and frustrated--by the classical dilemma faced by the Communist and Socialist parties in Europe. Can they somehow remain 'revolutionary', in at least the minimal sense of working effectively for the economic, social and political transformation of their societies, or are they fated to become...largely or totally integrated into those societies, adapting to existing institutions and values rather than seriously challenging them?³

The questions which Blackmer and Tarrow pose seem reasonable enough, and, on one level, merely extend the debate which has gone on since Robespierre sent Danton to the guillotine. But these questions also reveal the existence of a severe conceptual dilemma. For what, specifically, are the differences between working to 'transform' a society, and becoming 'integrated' into its structures?

For all of the discussion, and in spite of the way in which the history of modern politics assumes and accepts that there is a very real difference between a politics of reform, on the one hand, and of revolution, on the other, the conceptual distinction between them remains unclear and ambiguous. What is it that makes a political party radical? What observable phenomena allow us to infer that it is moving from a radical to a reformist perspective? What sorts of evidence permit us to assert that the party or organization or movement under study has now become deradicalized?

It is, perhaps, in the nature of the beast that radicalism, as a theoretical construct, should remain somewhat imprecise. Certainly, no paradigm of a radical political movement can be conceived as fixed and unchanging. It will always be relative to the historical conditions out of which it is developed, to the strategic problems faced by the activists of its time, and to the conceptual systems of the varying movements which may be contesting the dominant system. Yet, if there is no constant, no agreed upon point of conceptual reference in discussions of radicalism, then the whole enterprise of attempting to understand and evaluate a particular oppositionist movement shifts, at best, to the realm of purely subjective assertion, and, at worst, to that of irresponsible polemic. Depending upon the political allegiance of the writer, discussion reduces to something like this: my group is radical, your group, though radical, has a tendency towards compromise, and is not always reliable, their group is reformist and conservative.

There is room for judgment, bias, and point of view in political analysis, just so long as these are openly stated, and grounded in an overt, reasoned, and coherent theoretical framework. In the case at hand, therefore, the problem is to refine our understanding by refining

our definitional models. Students of political organization and political conflict, if they are to arrive at some sort of meaningful level of debate, must seek as rigorous, reliable, and systematic a method as possible for distinguishing between reformist political movements, and radical ones.

The larger view of the work to follow has to do with this ongoing discussion of the nature of radicalism, and the ways in which it differs from a 'politics of reform', or from movements which have become 'de-radicalized'. I place these terms in quotation marks precisely because, at this point in the study of political dynamics, no clearly defined meanings have been established for them.

I do not expect, of course, to resolve so long standing--and contentious--an issue as the difference between 'reform and revolution'. Yet, in the analysis of political movements, the distinction is recurrent. If for no other reason, then, a greater clarity is desirable in regard to the conceptual boundaries which demarcate these two 'modes of political action'. Such clarity is attainable only through the development of a conceptual framework which, by defining and justifying a set of significant, observable variables, will differentiate, within limits, radical from reformist organization and practice. This framework then stands as a sort of model, or theoretical paradigm, of radical politics, which is applied, through either case study or comparative method, to particular movements, parties, and/or groups.

It will be a major aim of this dissertation to develop such a model. The model must be understood not as a fixed and final word, but as a beginning attempt to break through to a set of political phenomena which have stubbornly retained an opaque theoretical character. For in any area of study where greater control and rigor are sought, a fully

realized model is only the product of a number of independent researches and investigations. Given enough congruence around basic assumptions, these researches, disagreeing on certain principles and emphases, but coalescing on others, build towards a comprehensive and consistent system of theoretical propositions. In this case, the model and its variations will define, and provide correspondence rules for depicting, the conceptual and empirical nature of the radicalism/deradicalization distinction. Thus, the model of radicalism which informs this particular work should be thought of as a step in what is a much larger, ongoing, intellectual enterprise. It is a working model, rooted in what I will call the Marxian discourse, and no more.

I begin with the notion of 'radicalism' as a political stance committed to somehow moving beyond the existing order. This approach, in spite of its looseness, seems a generally accepted one. It is what Blackmer and Tarrow have in mind when they talk about a movement's working to transform society, as opposed to letting itself become integrated into the society's institutions. It is implicit in Robert C. Tucker's definition of deradicalization as "'coming to terms with the existing order'." In the stage of deradicalization, Tucker writes, a movement

loses its revolutionary otherworldliness, the alienation from existing conditions arising out of its commitment to a future perfect order, and makes an accomodation to the world as it stands.⁴

The problem with this notion, of course, is its vagueness. In Tucker's case, for example, we are never given even the most tentative theoretical guidelines as how conceptually to differentiate otherworldliness from thisworldliness, alienation from integration, rejection from accomodation. One is left with generalities at exactly the point where analysis demands specifics.

Ralph Miliband's attempt to capture this distinction is somewhat more helpful, though, in the end, it too remains unacceptably general. Miliband makes a conceptual division between a reformist movement, and a reformist strategy. "... (T)here has always existed a trend in working-class movements... towards social reform;" he writes,

and this is a trend which, in so far as it has no thought of achieving the wholesale transformation of capitalist society into an entirely different social order, must be sharply distinguished from the reformist 'strategy', which has insisted that this was precisely its purpose.⁵

'Purpose' becomes the differential between reformist and radical political action. Radical movements have always included "the pursuit of reforms of every kind--economic, social and political within the framework of capitalism," Miliband points out. "But unlike parties of social reform," he continues,

parties which are guided by this particular Marxist tradition do not consider such reforms as being their ultimate purpose: these are at best steps and partial means towards a much larger purpose, which is declared to be the 'overthrow' of capitalism and the achievement of an altogether different, that is socialist, society.⁶

Again, many discussions of the relation between 'reform and revolution' turn, in one form or another, on this concept of underlying or long-range purpose. But still, this is not enough.

The notion that the nature of their political ends and purposes demarcates radical from reformist movements provides no more than a handle for grabbing onto the intricacies of the conceptual questions at play, here. It defines no empirical referents informing one as to how this distinction may be seen, perceived, recognized, grounded, understood. How, particularly in periods of political retrenchment, is one to distinguish between parties which have a long-range purpose of the overthrow of capitalism from those which do not? What do parties that

retain radical thrust and purpose, even as they support programs of reform, do? What do they look like on the level of the day-to-day? Can one generalize, in other words, as to observable, activist components which define a radical political movement, and which empirically distinguish it from a party of social reform? Or is radicalism simply a function of inner commitments and hidden beliefs, which suddenly appear at the crucial moment, like a Jack-in-the-Box, which jumps out and surprises one at the climactic note of "Pop Goes the Weasel"?

The basic premise of the analysis contained in the present study is that radicalism is defined by the extent to which a given oppositionist movement explicitly projects a class-conflict theory of society and politics as background to its activities in the day-to-day sphere. Such open and conscious projection of radical ideas and concepts I will refer to as 'ideological struggle'. This is a notion which, itself, grows out of two essential precepts of Marxian thought. The first precept is that revolutionary change requires, for its full realization, a change in human consciousness, a change in the very structures through which people come to perceive, understand, and judge both the workings of society and their place in it. The second precept is that radical politics, even when caught up in the work of the immediate, must keep before itself a vision of the long-range goal of the overthrow of capitalism, and its replacement by a system based on the values of social equality and communal responsibility.

Ideological struggle is the concept which this study will make central to its model, its paradigm, of a radical political movement. It is a term which, through sloppy usage and polemical distortion, has come to be more associated with dogma and political posturing, than with rigorous analysis of the nature of radical organization. Yet, in

terms of the assessment of political movements, the following work conceives of ideological struggle as neither a 'good' or a 'bad'. It is simply the defining mark of a radical practice. The goal of such a form of action is to provide populations with a conceptual foundation for, 1) examining the nature of dominant social arrangements, 2) for considering alternatives to those arrangements, and 3) for shifting social consciousness towards a new set of moral and political allegiances. To put the matter in a beginning and simplified fashion, what I will mean by ideological struggle is the public expression and open statement of radical assumptions and values as the context of immediate political choice and behavior. These, at least, are the minimum conditions for its presence. The quality of the struggle which goes on is another matter altogether, having to do with the character of the interaction between organization and constituency on the daily level of direct and face-to-face contact. The concept, here, is a complex one, and I will explain and elucidate it over the course of the next two chapters.

It follows from the above point of view that a radical movement may join coalitions for reform, may refuse to make the call for socialism an immediate issue, may put the time for an eventual confrontation with capitalism off to a distant future. But it may not withdraw from public view the ideas, assumptions, and values which place it into opposition to capitalism in the first place. A basic set of theoretical propositions, which may be said to compose a radical paradigm, must be manifest and publicly present to action, even if specific programs and demands are focused on immediate reform.

In the next chapter, drawing on major analysts of socialism and socialist politics of the early twentieth century, I will discuss some of the theoretical assumptions which, I suggest, be used as the defining

elements of a contemporary radical paradigm. The paradigm will be rooted in propositions about the materialist base of historical change, the fundamental contradiction between the interests of owning and producing classes, the legitimacy of violence, the international character of class struggle, the need for vanguard leadership and organization in the movement to transform consciousness. It is subject to revision and modification. But that is not the major point. Whatever the specifics of the paradigm settled upon, a radical movement, according to the perspective here presented, is characterized in its very definition by the extent to which it overtly lays out, in visible arenas of contact with desired constituencies, the basics of the philosophy and theory that bring it into opposition to the values and institutions of liberal capitalism.

The proposed paradigm of radical assumptions will be developed out of what I earlier referred to as the Marxian discourse. For, while reformist ideas and tendencies are at issue in Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program,⁷ written in 1875, the modern debate around the radical/reform distinction begins to germinate in the late 1880's and 1890's, as German workers are granted the franchise, the Social-Democratic party is legitimized, and the socialist movement is confronted by electoral success.

In these closing years of the nineteenth century, the German proletariat seems to become less militant, as legislation favoring its interests starts to emerge piecemeal from parliament, and a welfare state slowly takes shape. Some observers begin to ask why, under such conditions, it is important to remain radical at all. Others ask what it is that a movement must do, under such conditions, to retain its radicalism. They take a closer look at the notion of the long-range goal,

political education, the continued, public projection of radical ideas behind programs of reform. Lines are drawn, and out of conflicting perspectives on the dilemma between vision and compromise, inherent in any socialist movement, comes the modern formulation of the question around reform and revolution.

It is important to recognize that many of those who engaged in this debate did not accept the validity of Marxist theory, and were writing in opposition to some of its most basic premises. Yet, the theorists whose insights provide the most historically significant material for a contemporary radical paradigm argued their positions through a conceptual vocabulary articulated and sharpened by Marx. Thus, the proposed model will draw upon not only Lenin, Luxemburg, and Gramsci, but Roberto Michels and Eduard Bernstein as well. For, in the attempts of the latter to break with radical Marxist politics, they projected clear notions of what they meant by radicalism, what they felt the defining characteristics of a radical, as opposed to a reformist, world-view were. It is in this sense that I include them as part of an over-all Marxian discourse.

There are, of course, radical traditions other than the Marxist, to which this study is limited. But I turn to Marxism as a starting point for the simple reason that, since its inception, it has wrestled deeply with the question of the theoretical/strategic differences between reform and revolution, and, in many ways, set the terms of the debate. Let me suggest, therefore, that it is possible to identify a certain configuration of political behavior and action as 'radical' without agreeing either with the validity of the premises from which that behavior is derived, or with the ends it is designed to achieve. An organizational practice, in this reading, becomes categorized as radical by virtue of two factors. The first is its rootedness in a set of assumptions, values,

and goals about the nature of class systems and how they change, about the potential for conscious human action, and about the desirability of a particular social-economic structure. The content of these assumptions is drawn from a general study of the classic theorists of socialist politics, some of whom were writing in support of a Marxian radicalism, and others, in refutation. The second factor which identifies a radical movement is the manner in which it extends outward the ideas and assumptions of its theory and philosophy, in the attempt to touch and transform the consciousness of those to whom it makes its appeal. The problem then becomes one of applying the proposed standards of radical action to given movements at given periods in its history, in order to assess whether, or to what degree, they either gravitated towards a politics of deradicalization, or kept within the orbit of a radical one.

The specific aim of this dissertation is to resolve the question of the extent to which the American Communist party, in the decade of the nineteen-thirties, either maintained a revolutionary character, or, at some point during these years, became reformist and deradicalized. The method of the study will be to develop, and systematically apply, a model of radicalism to the behavior of the Party from 1928 to 1938. My conclusion is that, by the criteria of the suggested model, the Party, after the re-election of Rossevelt in 1936, did, indeed, become a deradicalized political movement. But, I will argue, if the American Communist party, in the second half of the decade of the nineteen-thirties, became deradicalized, it is not because it gave support to constitutional reform, or because it ceased to see socialism as an immediate issue. It was because the Communists refused to ground these strategies in a larger

program of ideological articulation outside the formal New Deal coalition.

I make no formal hypothesis. The answer to my central question will prove more complex than an absolute, either-or formulation--that the Party did or did not become deradicalized--will permit. The Party may have been radical in some ways, but not in others. The problem is to discover the methods for loosening such knotted realities, so that one may grasp the complex manner in which the strands of a radically oriented politics come to twist around one another.

There is a broad literature dealing with the question of the radical or reformist nature of socialist opposition movements, especially in relation to the political behavior of Communist parties. It is within the context of such studies that the present work is situated, although its specific subject is American Communism from the Third Period through the Popular Front. For reasons which I have touched on over the course of this chapter, and which will be clarified in the next, I am most concerned with the relation between ideology and program in the American party. In the main, details of the Party's internal feuds and tensions will take on salience, for what follows, only as they emerged publicly, or as they affected the direction of the Party's theoretical line, and the content of its organizational activity. Again to put the matter in streamlined form, my paper will focus on these particular aspects of Party functioning because of the way the proposed conceptual model ties the notion of 'radicalism' to that of 'overt ideological struggle'.

Let me state, however, that the approach to radicalism here developed will challenge certain of the dominant and prevailing understandings of the concept. One set of these understandings I mark as

amorphous and fuzzy. Another, I will attempt directly to overturn and reverse. Indeed, in these challenges and reversals may lie the work's major contribution to the literature. For, on the one hand, radicalism is often associated with the mere expression of revolutionary slogans, or with the promotion of 'socialism' as an immediate political issue. There is no explicitly stated concern, in the run of these analyses, with the question of how a radical movement is to relate its long-range purpose to the constraints of a resistant social consciousness.

There is another major perspective in the field, as well.

This conceives of radical action as what goes on inside a party or movement. Under this point of view, radicalism has little or nothing to do with the face an organization shows to the outside world. It may look reformist--and even liberal--on the surface; but it remains radical--and untrustworthy--within.

The theory of radicalism presented in the following pages, and applied to American Communist party action in the years of the Great Depression, attempts to meet deficiencies which I consider inherent in both these approaches. As a way of closing out this introductory chapter, I will cite some of the precedents.

Milton Cantor, in his history of twentieth century American radicalism, The Divided Left, takes the side of those who argue that the American Communist party became a deradicalized political movement. During the period of the Popular Front, says Cantor, "America's Communists turned to liberal democrats. Means were substituted for revolutionary goals, and thus the CP surrendered its identity as an independent force."⁸ Ronald Radosh, in a 1963 article in Monthly Review, took a similar stance. "A glance back at American history," he wrote, "suggests that rather than having played a radical role, the Left has supported humanitarian

efforts at reform, while refraining from any fundamental criticism of the capitalist system."⁹

From the other side, there are those whose arguments imply that the Communist enterprise, as developed within the Bolshevik framework, is incapable of becoming deradicalized. No matter what the external tactic, there is always the inner, conspiratorial drive towards the seizure of power. "For the twentieth century communist," Daniel Bell wrote in The End of Ideology,

...any gestures of support, any pressure for social reforms, are simply tactics, a set of Potemkin villages, the facades to be torn down after the necessary moment for deception has passed. His is the ethic of 'ultimate ends'; only the goal counts, the means are inconsequential.¹⁰

Any possible meaning content which might be assigned to the concept of a deradicalizing communist movement is denied by this point of departure. Reformist actions are just misleading epiphenomena, secondary occurrences which an observer must be careful not to mistake for the primary and determining events that are going on beneath the surface of things.

Henry Kissinger applies the same sort of reasoning to the behavior of the Eurocommunist parties, which, of late, claim to be willing to work within the constraints of an alliance-based, pluralist politics. They have renounced strict dependence on the Soviet Union, and jettisoned the sanctity of 'proletarian dictatorship' as a necessary and guiding political concept. Kissinger is suspicious. He made his suspicions known in a speech delivered to a conference on 'Italy and Eurocommunism', held in Washington D.C. in June, 1977, and sponsored jointly by the American Enterprise Institute, and the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace. "I find it hard to believe," Kissinger told the gathering,

that after decades of vilifying Social Democracy and treating it as their mortal enemy...Communist parties have suddenly become Social Democrats. Whether or not they are independent of Moscow, Communists represent a philosophy which by its very nature and their own testimony stands outside the 'bourgeois' framework of Western constitutional history...

...a few weeks ago, to the great irritation of their socialist allies, the French communists estimated the cost of the economic program of the two parties at over \$100 billion. The communist program--by definition--calls for the radical transformation of society; by the very nature of their beliefs Communists will be driven to bring about institutional changes that would make their ascendancy permanent.¹¹

For Kissinger, communist parties, as long as they remain separately organized as communist parties, are incapable of becoming deradicalized. Their very essence makes them a threat to the civil freedoms associated with liberal democracy.

Each of these approaches to the question of the deradicalization of Communist parties leaves conceptual gaps. Radosh and Cantor, for example, leave unexplained the theoretical bases for their assertions that American Communism became no different than a movement of reform. Thus, Cantor's description of the turn taken by Communist program during the later New Deal is accurate. "Gone was the old insistence that the capitalist state apparatus had to be dismantled," he writes, "the hallowed belief in working-class immiserization, the distinctions among pacifism, liberalism, marxism."¹² All of this may be true, yet it remains unclear why each of these positions are, at any given moment, essential to a radical politics. There are both philosophical and strategic issues to be confronted, here, before one can dismiss the Communists as having become unequivocally reformist.

Let us say it is correct to argue that, after a certain point, the Communists refrained "from any fundamental criticism of the capi-

talist system". What of the question of winning support from a working class which has little understanding of socialism, and which is highly suspicious of the concept's very legitimacy? In such cases, 'refraining from fundamental criticism' might reasonably be defended as a necessary tactic, especially if the period is one of liberal ascendance, radical retreat, and threatened fascist advance. On what basis, then, is the judgement made that a particular program or set of strategies do, or do not, imply the presence of deradicalization?

My critique of Cantor and Radosh is that, whether or not their judgements are correct, they make them, in a sense, glibly, without reference to the classic dilemma faced by any principled, ideological movement. Under pressure of the historical and day-to-day, an oppositionist movement must constantly make thorny and difficult choices as to how best deal with given and existing levels of class consciousness, at the same time that it is attempting to challenge that consciousness, and push it forward. Cantor and Radosh leave untouched the most significant aspect of the problem: to understand what sorts of approaches to political struggle allow a movement to remain both radical, on the one hand, and, on the other, more than just an isolated sect. Assume there is a middle ground between a) a revolutionary purity that leaves a group talking only to itself, and b) a total absorption into liberal reform politics, that destroys radical bite and direction; then one responsibility of critics is to depict what the middle ground might look like, how it is to be theoretically justified, and why the particular scenario they are analyzing does, or does not, fall within its limits. Cantor and Radosh describe and judge. They do not explain. To this extent, their analyses are inadequate.

The other approach to the nature of Communist radicalism, that it somehow remains internal and unseen, no matter what is going on outside in terms of ideology and program, also suffers from a kind of conceptual slippage. For this model of Communist party behavior tends toward an implicit identification between the existence of a hidden, manipulative core, and what is meant by 'radicalism' in a Communist movement.

Under this explanatory model, Communist parties can never become 'deradicalized' because, whatever else, there always lurks within them a committed group of militants whose only goal is the seizure of power for its own sake. Thus, Gabriel Almond, in his classic study, The Appeals of Communism, distinguishes between the inner, or esoteric party, and the visible, or exoteric party. The exoteric party refers to the Party's presentation of itself as a legitimate political ally, ready to compromise temporarily with liberalism in the pursuit of common ends, and to its claim to be motivated by a demand for social justice more thoroughgoing and consistent than that made by any other political organization. Once the bait is taken by the innocent, but idealistic, militant, however, he or she is more and more exposed to the machinations of the inner, esoteric, model of communist activism, which is dedicated only to the achievement of organizational dominance, national political control, and the triumph of Soviet foreign policy interests. "Thus, to summarize the value orientation of the ideal Communist militant," Almond writes, "it should be pointed out that all values save power have been squeezed out."¹³ Idealistic political actor has been turned into deployable agent of a cleverly disguised conspiracy.

It is of utmost importance to recognize that, according to Almond, not all who join the Party, and identify with its outer, overtly stated

values and goals, understand how it actually functions. They do not become part of the unchanging, 'radical', leadership core; they remain oblivious to its true purposes. "To view all party members as equal participants in the Communist conspiracy is to fly in the face of fact," Gabriel Almond writes.

It has generally been the case that only a minority of the party membership is fully aware of the integral power orientation of the party and of its relation to the Soviet Union. The rest of the party are dupes or half-dupes.¹⁴

There are thus two parties, outer and inner, determined and determining, exoteric and esoteric. The first seems flexible and willing to make strategic compromises; the second remains rigidly committed to eventually destroying all opposition. Here, with their supposed conscious duplicity, reside all those who, in Bell's phrase, subscribe to 'the ethic of ultimate ends'.

One major difficulty with this model lies with the problem of demonstrating the existence of an entity which, by its very definition, is hidden and unseen. Indeed, the esoteric party is so well hidden, that the overwhelming majority of ex-Communist party members who Almond interviewed were never able to see it at all. "What is interesting in our findings as to these processes of assimilation into and defection from the communist movement," Almond states,

is that so few respondents fully perceived the esoteric party at the point of defection, or in their subsequent thinking about their experience. In other words, most of them did not perceive the esoteric party when they joined, and were not fully aware of it when they left.¹⁵

A reasonable hypothesis, given this bit of empirical evidence, is that the esoteric party may not be as significant a variable in explaining the behavior of communist activists, as those committed to this model of communist organization insist. For how is it that such a small,

unseen group manipulates, to so great effect, large masses of people, without even the most angry and disillusioned of these ever suspecting? At what point in their passage from 'exoteric' to 'esoteric' existence do party members turn into the soulless Machiavellians who, according to this view, manipulate men and women for power ends alone? And if people at all reaches of the Party do not even know of the existence of this inner conspiracy, where and how is it to be found?

None of these sorts of questions seem to bother Almond. He proceeds with his original formulation. The finding, he writes, "should not occasion surprise, since clarity in the perception of one's political associations and affiliations is generally rare."¹⁶ Communists, Almond continues, are no more perceptive in regard to the true nature of their political experiences than the members of any other group. His conclusion, in other words, is not that the conspiracy theory of Communism might require modification and re-examination. On the contrary, the hypothesis of the conspiratorial core is retained as a given. The only logical conclusion, therefore, is that once-active members of the Communist party are not as clear about the roots of their behavior and choices as are the political analysts who stand outside the Party, but who, in spite of the lack of direct evidence, really know how Communism operates.

It is almost as if Almond, in his attempt to formalize the notion of an 'inner' and 'outer' party were trying to make a distinction between 'real' Communists--who were deserving of some sort of ostracism and social sanction--and innocent followers, who did not really understand the nature of what they were involved in. "... (T)he penalties imposed for error and self-deception ought not to be the same as penalties imposed for disloyalty and treason," he wrote, warning against what he considered the

excesses of Cold War anti-Communism. "Our traditions require far greater discrimination in the attribution of guilt and far greater readiness for forgiveness than our actions have reflected."¹⁷ But who are the guilty, here? All members of the 'esoteric' party? Or just those who actually engaged in espionage? Or is the fact of being a committed Communist identical with disloyalty and treason? And how, in those cases where Communist leaders did not actually engage in spying, are we to distinguish between authentic Communists and mere dupes? Is giving the 'whole of one's life' to the Party organization the measure? Perhaps we should use as evidence advocacy of the legitimacy of violent overthrow, or adherence to the theoretical notions advanced in the writings of Marx and Lenin. But both of these approaches are fraught with difficulty; besides, it is unclear why such declared political commitments should be 'penalized'.

The temptation to make a division between an exoteric and esoteric party, between 'real' Communists, and only partial or misled ones, may be great. But it is run through with inconsistency and ambiguity; it profoundly misunderstands the character and nature of the phenomena it is trying to explain. For the recognition that a dual ideological focus, one on the values and ideals of Marxism, and one on the exigencies of power politics, generally determines the behavior and choices of Communist leadership, performs the same function. One is not dealing with a bifurcated reality, but with a spectrum which, marked by no sharp discontinuities, runs from minimum to maximum commitment to organizational life within the framework of an international Communist movement. There are not 'two parties'; there is one party, composed of a membership which, in varying degrees, is prepared to submit itself to the movement's

decisions and authority.

Of course, none of this, I grant, stands as disproof of the theory of the esoteric party, since, in the nature of the case, it can never be disproven. So how is one to tell whether a Communist party has become deradicalized or not? The safest bet, in terms of the dual party model, is simply to assume that a Communist party will always keep its double nature, and thus, always remain radical from within. But there is a subtle conceptual difficulty with this approach. For, in most cases, it rests on an unstated assumption which identifies clandestine militancy and Communist radicalism. But what is the theoretical justification for such an identification? There is no logical connection between the existence of a hidden and retained revolutionary purpose on the part of a central leadership, on the one hand, and the notion of what it is that, on the other, defines and comprises the radicalism of a party movement. The two, in most forms of this model, are implicitly linked, with no conscious discussion of a rationale through which theory ties them together. The linkage is merely assumed.

Finally, let me emphasize that I do not dispute the contention that Communist officials often said one thing, and did another. Party literature, exemplified by the Daily Worker, was filled with half-truths, selective reporting, mindless repetition, Comintern rhetoric and dogma. Nor would I deny that, within the Parties associated with Stalin's control of the International, conspiracies, frame-ups, manipulation, dissemblance, and the outright use of groups and individuals occurred on a regular basis. Such phenomena prove to be an inherent part of all Stalinist organization. There will be good reason to look at the nature of these intrigues over the course of the following study. For, as I said above,

my challenge is of a conceptual nature. I question the attempt to identify this behavior, and the political deceptions and distortions present in the historical record, with the notion of what it is that defines a radical movement.

What I am suggesting is that, no matter whether one holds to the thesis that specific Communist parties became deradicalized during the Popular Front, or believes that they retained a radical character and direction, one hidden under a false public image, there is needed an explicit, theoretically argued, and logically rigorous model of what a radical movement/organization/party looks like and how it behaves. Part I will make a beginning attempt at the development of such a model for the assessment of 'radical practice'. The chapters in Parts II and III will apply this model to the major programs, political campaigns, and community involvements undertaken by the American Communist party during the nineteen thirties.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

¹Hobsbawm, E. J., The Age of Revolution (New York: New American Library, 1962), pp. 84, 85

²See, for general historical background to this period, Jacques Droz, Europe Between Revolutions, 1815-1848 (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); and William L. Langer, Political and Social Upheaval, 1832-1852 (New York: Harper and Row, 1969)

³Donald L. M. Blackmer, Introduction to Communism in Italy and France, edited by Donald L. M. Blackmer and Sidney Tarrow (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 5

⁴Tucker, Robert C., The Marxian Revolutionary Idea (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), p. 186

⁵Miliband, Ralph, Marxism and Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 155

⁶Ibid., p. 157

⁷Marx, Karl, "Critique of the Gotha Program" in Marx and Engels, Selected Works, Volume Three (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), pp. 9-30.

⁸Cantor, Milton, The Divided Left (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), p. 118

⁹Radosh, Ronald, "American Radicalism: Liberal or Socialist?" Monthly Review 14 (February, 1963): 564

¹⁰Bell, Daniel, "The Failure of American Socialism" in The End of Ideology (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 292.

¹¹Kissinger, Henry A., "Communist Parties in Western Europe: Challenge to the West," in Eurocommunism: The Italian Case (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), p. 182

¹²Cantor, p. 118

¹³Almond, Gabriel A., The Appeals of Communism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 18

¹⁴Ibid., p. 383

¹⁵Ibid., p. 299

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 385

CHAPTER TWO

THE BASICS OF A RADICAL PARADIGM: A MODEL
DERIVED FROM THE MARXIAN DISCOURSE

- 1 -

The American Communist party is the one Marxist organization which has at least some grounds for claiming that, from the Depression, through the onset of McCarthyism, it was a significant and even influential presence on the political scene in this country. This is not to say that it was the only Marxist organization in the United States; nor is it to imply that left-wing groups must have some sort of Marxist-Leninist credentials in order to have a claim to be considered radical. But in the history of the American left, the Communists played too prominent a role for even their bitterest opponents, within the progressive movement and tradition, to ignore them.¹ The Communists' ideas and experience, therefore, have continually acted as a magnet upon those concerned with the character of socialist organization in America.

The debate over the meaning of the Communists' strategy and organizational approach has touched every generation of progressives since the Depression. In the early to mid-50's, for example, as American radicals began to assess the impact of the times on their hopes and directions, the editors of the Monthly Review, an independent socialist journal founded in 1949, opened its pages to a discussion of what was happening on the Left, and what sorts of strategies radical socialists should begin to consider. In a series entitled 'What Ails Socialism', the Review published a number of articles and letters which a concerned readership had been sending them. Many of these writings were critical of the Communist party, and the attempts it had made to foster social change.

"For a generation now, the main Marxist organization in this

country has been the American Communist Party," an article by George Woodard stated. But, Woodard argued, despite their leading position, the Communists had ignored one of the most crucial propositions ever developed by Leninist theory. This was the thesis that socialism "must be taught to people by bringing them in contact with a broader viewpoint than their own, which will help them to understand their own experience and problems." This idea, formulated in Part III of What Is To Be Done?, underlies the whole notion of radical movement as both educator and vanguard. "The struggle for immediate issues in itself," Woodward wrote, paraphrasing Lenin, "can never bring anyone an understanding of the need for socialism." The Communists, he complained, had violated this basic principle of radical practice. They were, "in their day to day activities, practical men...

...the Communists have a naive faith, despite the words of their supposed master, Lenin, that the struggle for immediate issues in itself will lead people to an understanding of the need for socialism.

If anyone actually knew the number of signatures on petitions that have in the past been secured by American Communists, how many broken toilets they have forced landlords to repair, how many new members have been signed up (often in a very temporary way) during recruiting drives, how many dollars have been raised for various causes, the total figures would be amazing. Much of this activity has rendered valuable social services. Yet...the emphasis of the American Communists has always been on leading immediate struggles rather than on making socialism a meaningful idea to Americans...

In this situation the Communists' educational work, contrary to their intention, was forced to become sterile and abstract...²

Woodard's allegation is that the Communists, in their public political practice, were no more than a party of reform, for they studiously avoided engaging the consciousness, the political understanding, of people. They sought only to involve them in the immediate political

act.

The archetypal response to Woodard's critique does not deny his theoretical proposition about the character of radical politics; rather, it asserts that the Communists could move towards the expansion of class consciousness in America only by taking the tack which they did. For it is not enough merely to bring working people into 'contact with a broader viewpoint than their own', argue the defenders of the American Communist strategy. For Lenin also said that one could develop socialist awareness among the masses only by relating to them on the basis of what they saw as the most pressing and problematic issues in their lives, not on what some self-proclaimed radicals wanted them to see. "Nowhere in the history of the labor movement," stated an anonymous article, written in answer to Woodard,

have the masses been awakened to a class-conscious understanding for this need for socialism except in the daily fight for immediate goals...

...Development of class consciousness among the American workers by a patient and unwavering educational process is still the only way to lay a firm foundation for a socialist movement in this country. This educational process must go on on two levels simultaneously, that of socialist theory and that of socialist action in the daily struggle for immediate goals.³

It is important to note the way in which the proponents for each side in this dispute seem to talk past one another. Those critical of the Party invariably argue that by immersing itself in the struggle for day to day reforms, it abandoned the attempt to transform the consciousness of workers. The basic Communist response to this charge is that a radical movement must start with the existing levels of consciousness in a given working class, if its members are eventually to move towards an understanding and acceptance of socialist ideas.

Some common term, or frame of reference, is missing, here. But what it might be is not clear.

Almost the exact same debate reappears in the pages of the Monthly Review a decade later, in 1963. By this time, liberalism, stirred by the vitality of the burgeoning civil rights movement, and by the aura of promise which surrounded the election of John F. Kennedy, had begun to awaken itself. The old and familiar question around the acceptability of the American Communist party as a role model for radical politics came once more to the fore on the militant left. Ronald Radosh, then a graduate student in history at the University of Wisconsin, specifically took the Communist party to task for the way in which it had so totally embraced the New Deal. "During the New Deal," Radosh wrote,

the Left uncritically beat the drums for Roosevelt, acting as a left-wing adjunct for the administration. While most socialists ended their attachment to the Socialist Party and became ordinary New Dealers, the Communists separated themselves from the regular liberal Rooseveltian only by their ideological and political tie to the Soviet Union, which gave their movement a rationale for independent existence.⁴

The Communist party did not follow a radical politics, according to this line of reasoning, not so much because of its support for New Deal reforms, but because, outside this framework of support, it failed to articulate a clear-cut socialist ideology and direction.

Robert Forrey, managing editor of Mainstream magazine, replied a month later. Again, he was concerned to demonstrate that, without involvement in the fight for reform, a radical movement can have no impact on a working class imbued with capitalist ideology.

...the task of a radical is not so simple. While working for socialism and trying to convince the workers of the superiority of that system over capitalism, the radical must

also help the workers, the oppressed minorities, and others in their day-to-day struggles with monopoly capitalism on bread-and-butter issues. A fight for reforms is part of the process by which working people, in capitalist countries become politically educated...⁵

Reformist practice, according to Forrey, in no way indicates that a revolutionary party has abandoned its long range goals. The struggle for reforms not only helps workers to improve their living conditions somewhat, but, at the same time, exposes to them the limits and boundaries of the private enterprise system. In pushing for liberal reform, the argument runs, the Communists were furthering the cause of radicalism, not moving away from it.

An attempt to clear out some of the ambiguities which seem to cling continually to this debate around American Communism was made in the journal Socialist Revolution in 1976. The magazine published an exchange of views between Max Gordon, a former Daily Worker editor who dropped his Communist membership in 1958, and James Weinstein, an historian identified with the New Left. Old radicals and new had finally decided to face each other down on this issue, and rid the discussion of as many of its perplexities and confusions as they could.

Gordon took up the gauntlet, and attempted to defend and justify the Popular Front tactics of the Party. They had been, he insisted, compatible with, and expressive of, a revolutionary politics. He developed in detail the old argument that radical organization, in order to be effective, cannot move too far beyond existing levels of working-class consciousness.

Any viable movement for socialism must arise out of the needs, aspirations, and struggles of the working class. Its tactics must be geared to aiding and stimulating working-class organization and struggle. To the extent that it does this effectively, it gains credibility among workers as well as respect for its total program and outlook. To the extent that it fails to do this, it remains isolated from the working class and sterile as a revolutionary force. The movement for socialist transformation cannot develop except as a function of these working-class struggles, and the very nature of these struggles requires a program for meeting working-class needs. That program cannot now be socialist, since the great mass of workers are not socialist oriented and would reject it, nor would it be credible in any case as an immediate solution to their problems...⁶

By extension, Gordon implies that the case was not so different in the thirties.

Had the Communist Party failed to associate itself with the workers and New Deal liberals in the intense political conflict over social programs and in trade union organization, its consequent isolation would have rendered it impotent in the struggle against⁷ reactionary big business elements sympathetic to fascism.

The essential theoretical point here is that, in a social atmosphere hostile to radical ideology, only through coalition and the maintenance of independent political direction can a radical movement ever retain influence on significant numbers of working people.

Weinstein's reply to Gordon did not simply re-iterate the old charge of reformism. It clearly had as its primary concern the search for some sort of theoretical juncture with the old left on concepts of strategy. "I agree with Gordon's impulse to combine the best features of the old and new lefts," Weinstein states, "and especially his insistence that socialist parties must confront and work within American society as it actually exists."⁸ But, Weinstein continues, the Party, even as it worked within the system to change the system, never presented a clear, ideological alternative to the

system. It is exactly this failure which, according to Weinstein, marks the movement as deradicalized.

Sure, a socialist movement should enter coalitions with other groups around immediate goals, but first it must be a socialist movement. It must have a public presence and a distinct popular politics of its own, otherwise in any coalition or alliance it can only end up strengthening the politics of its 'temporary' allies--just as the Communist Party ended up strengthening the liberals in the nineteen-thirties, to its despair after the war, when the liberals turned against it. In short, a coalition policy requires the building of a popular movement for socialism. Otherwise it is a subordination policy.⁹

Weinstein's underlying theoretical assumption turns out to be no different than Gordon's. Both accept that reformist tactics in and of themselves are not sufficient evidence for deradicalization.

Old and new left theories on the nature of radicalism begin to converge at this point. It is the support of reform policies without, at the same time, the articulation and presentation of a clearly defined opposition ideology that indicates a deradicalized movement. Weinstein and Gordon agree: the level and direction of ideological struggle distinguish the revolutionary from the reformist party.

This discussion between Gordon and Weinstein moves the study of American Communism forward. For their disagreement is, in essence, empirical. They simply make different assessments as to, first, whether the Communist party did, or did not, engage in sharp ideological conflict with New Deal liberalism, even as it supported Roosevelt and legislative reform; and, secondly, as to whether the ideas the Party espoused in its platform and literature did or did not lead in the direction of some sort of fundamental confrontation with the capitalist system.

The issue of radicalism, these commentators imply, cannot be settled by a narrow focus on particular strategies and tactics. Rather, a key variable in the measure of radicalism is traced by the extent to which a leftist movement, in its day to day practice, openly and consciously links theory and broad social ideas, ideas asserting the long-range political incompatibility of owning and laboring classes, to the issues and activities of the moment. Radical practice connects struggle for the ideas of socialism to the struggle for particular reform. It is not a matter of one or the other, but of a mesh between the two. Earlier arguments around the practice of the American Communist party went past each other because the disputants chose to emphasize only those aspects of radicalism which suited their own, predetermined political position.

Following this line of analysis, it is essential to recognize that the theoretical roots of radical social practice have always emphasized involvement with day-to-day reform. While there are significant leftist traditions which view any support for reform action as a sully of revolutionary purity, radical thought, in the main, has rejected the dichotomy 'no reform--insurrection only'. It has, rather, focused on the question of 'reform in what context, and for what ends'. I base my reading, here, on that of Ralph Miliband, whose concept of revolutionary politics is logical companion to the framework built by Gordon and Weinstein. "The real issue," Miliband states, "is the perspective from which reforms are viewed, what they are expected to achieve, and what else than reforms is being pursued."¹⁰ Agitation for reform is not only compatible with, but essential to a politics of radicalism.

According to the framework briefly sketched out in the above paragraphs, a revolutionary movement, as it pushes for reform, must, at the same time, express a set of clear, independent, ideological alternatives, which articulate clear opposition to capitalism. But such a methodology, which attempts to distinguish between a radical and reformist politics on the basis of their explicit ideological setting, has a prior mandate. It must first present a paradigm which can be acknowledged by concerned observers to reflect, reasonably, the essential content of a radical belief-system. Empirical analysis then explores how, and whether, the elements of this value frame and model of social reality are made manifest for a movement's potential constituencies.

Such an approach almost automatically gives rise to specific questions that can be addressed to particular movements, and for which verifiable answers can be found. Has the organization openly and consistently presented social and political ideas in direction opposition capitalism, despite its affirmation and support of reformist activity? Where do these ideas appear? How are they cast? In terms of what sorts of specific programs? If the movement or party makes no direct calls for socialism, or drops advocacy of forceful overthrow and proletarian dictatorship, then, do its structures, programs, and educational forums convey values and assumptions which are, in conceptual origin and extension, fundamentally incompatible with capitalist institutions and modes of legitimacy? Finally, and crucially, how has the movement worked to disseminate its ideas so that they become an ongoing and essential part of day to day organizational involvement. Here, one looks to such specifics as the Party press, activity in the trade-union

movement, or the character of neighborhood organizing. For now, however, it is with the more general, ideological framework that I am concerned.

If this focus on ideology is a plausible starting approach, then it will not be difficult to demonstrate that, during the period of the Popular Front, the American Communist party did indeed move towards a deradicalized politics. For even Max Gordon, who stands as an ardent defender of the thesis that the Party remained revolutionary in these years, grants that the Communists, through the particular way in which they interpreted the Popular Front strategy, abandoned ideological struggle. "With projection of the Popular Front," Gordon patiently explains in his debate with Weinstein, "preservation of bourgeois democracy against fascism became a primary immediate goal. But," he continued, "this tactical shift

did not result in any basic theoretical change concerning the overthrow of capitalism by Communist-led revolution, proletarian dictatorship, and the Soviet state form as the sole way to socialism. Though largely assumed rather than reasserted, this remained a fundamental, largely unchallenged aspect of the Communist ideological apparatus.¹¹

However, if the radical framework was 'largely assumed', how was anyone supposed to know about it? How could a movement which claimed that its goal was to transform and radicalize the consciousness of working people achieve its end if it never bothered to talk about and publicly defend the ideas which supposedly defined that consciousness in the first place?

If the American Communist party held onto its radical convictions somewhere deep within, but neglected to reveal them to anyone else, then, by Gordon's own admission, it succumbed to a reformist

politics. Whatever it said about itself and the importance of ideological struggle, it acted on the notion that it could transform consciousness simply by leading people in the fight for immediate, though valued, reform. If this, indeed, was the character of its practice, then the charges of its critics stand.

In what follows in Part I, I will attempt to develop a detailed working model of radical assumptions, and then deal with the impact which Stalinist modes of political thought had upon them. Parts II and III will apply this model, along with its Stalinist reshaping, to the political practice of American Communism, from the introduction of the Third Period in the late 1920's, up through the appearance, in America, of the Democratic Front, in 1938. The Democratic Front, I think it can be shown, was a peculiarly American extension of the Popular Front, in which all notions of class conflict and the struggle for socialism, disappeared into a populist support for Roosevelt and the New Deal.

- 2 -

Beginning with the left end of the political spectrum, the most significant sources for a paradigm of radical politics are, I suggest, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Antonio Gramsci. The theoretical differences among these writers are real, but as I hope to demonstrate, not of such moment as to put them outside a common framework of understanding.¹²

Two other thinkers whose approaches to the concept of radicalism are helpful in understanding its nature are Roberto Michels, and Eduard Bernstein. They wrote in opposition to the radical Marxist politics

of their time. Michels, once a member of the syndicalist wing of the German Social Democracy, came, in the midst of his career, to believe that the socialist enterprise was unachievable, and hopelessly naive.¹³ The phenomenon of deradicalization was the central theme of his work.

Bernstein's major work, Evolutionary Socialism, remains the most systematic and structurally coherent presentation of reformist theory available.¹⁴ As such, it can function as a benchmark of the degree to which the ideas and policies of an oppositionist movement undergo transition, and begin to adjust to the existing order. I will use Bernstein's writing, therefore, in the attempt to elucidate a pole of reformist, or accomodationist ideas; they will stand as counter-balance to the radical model. The term 'accomodationist', I should add, is used without pejorative intent.

The following survey of some of the major theorists of socialism will yield five principles which, I suggest, be considered essential elements in any paradigm of contemporary radical politics. These basic conceptions are: 1) historical materialism; 2) class conflict; 3) proletarian internationalism; 4) the legitimacy of force and violence; 5) the centrality of ideological struggle, and vanguard organization. I want briefly to define each of these principles. Then, in the rest of the chapter, I will elaborate on them, and attempt to show how they were derived from the body of theoretical literature mentioned above.

1. Historical materialism assumes that technological and productive conditions are the primary determining factors in the shaping and establishment of human belief systems. Men are the pro-

ducers of their conceptions and ideas, Marx and Engels wrote in the German Ideology, "real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces, and of the inter-course corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms."¹⁵

2. Class conflict assumes that the economic and political interests of owning and producing classes are in fundamental opposition. Such social contradiction is understood to be structurally inherent in any system based on private ownership in the means of production.

3. Proletarian internationalism states that, if the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism is to occur, producers must come to view their primary political identity in class terms, as opposed to national, regional, ethnic, or sexual ones.

4. The legitimacy of force and violence is obvious in its meaning, although it is important to recognize that, as formulated, the concept does not imply that force and violence, will, in every case, be either necessary or inevitable.

5. Finally, there is ideological struggle and vanguard organization, the notion that the over-riding goal of revolutionary practice must be the transformation of consciousness. Ideological struggle implies that the radical paradigm itself--its ideas, directions, and values--must serve as the overt and public context of all strategy, tactics, and immediate political ends. It is the responsibility of leadership to introduce this theoretical background, and give it material force, through tangible organization and direct practice.

I propose that the above constructs be taken as essential elements in any contemporary, radical, Marxist politics. I make no claim, however, that they exhaust the content of radicalism; as a coherent system of ideas they are limited to those parties and movements which

define themselves as falling within the orbit of Marxist theory and practice. Radical movements outside of, or in opposition to, the Marxist tradition will have different assumptions, and look to a different set of historical sources.

Nor is the above the 'true' model of radical Marxist politics. I proceed on the methodological principal that models are neither finally true or false, but approximations of an ever-surprising reality. They are ways of letting us get as consistent and logically ordered an understanding as possible of a given collection of phenomena. This aspect of their epistemological character is not affected by the fact that, in the case at hand, the model is designed both as a theory of modern social structure, and of the range of action necessary for changing that structure.

Thus, the propositions in the suggested framework are open to further testing, exploration, revision. I believe, however that as they presently stand they are sufficient for assessing the radical character of any twentieth century Communist movement. I want, now, to explain the derivation of the model by briefly tracing it back to some of its theoretical origins. I begin with Roberto Michels, who, in his study of German Social Democracy, acknowledged that analysis of the deradicalization of a movement presupposes some concept of what a radical politics looks like.

Michels, in his classic study, Political Parties,¹⁶ cogently and consistently defined deradicalization in terms of the organizational degeneration of ideology. He believed this degeneration to be inevitable, and identified it with the emergence of rigid, status-

quo oriented bureaucracies in the midst of allegedly progressive and egalitarian political movements and structures. But, in order to sustain the hypothesis that democratic and egalitarian values collapsed in the face of bureaucratic social organization, Michels insisted on isolating the specific content of what was, for him the institutionally doomed framework of ideas. Michels recognized that he had to work forward from a given set of ideological beliefs if he were to demonstrate the ways in which socialist bureaucracy began to accommodate itself to an elitist order. He therefore maintained a consistent distinction between a particular form of organization, bureaucracy, and the system of values by which that organization is characterized.

Michels considered bureaucracy a necessary and sufficient condition for the emergence of deradicalization. But he never collapsed the two into a single conceptualization. Bureaucracy, for Michels, reflected the growth of a salaried, professional, and technically expert leadership at the organizational center of a social democratic movement. Deradicalization was a process whereby this leadership, and the policies it formulated and put into practice, underwent an ideological turnabout in outlook and direction.

Michels referred constantly to the ideological beliefs of the socialism of his day; the disappearance of those beliefs from theoretical and political activity served as a measure for the emergence of deradicalization.

As the party bureaucracy increases, two elements which constitute the essential pillars of every socialist conception undergo an inevitable weakening: an understanding of the wider and more ideal cultural aims of socialism, and an understanding of the international multiplicity of its manifestations. Mechanism becomes an end in itself... (I)n propor-

portion as, in their own country, paths of activity were opened for the socialists...the more did a recognition of the demands of the every day life of the party divert their attention from immortal principles.¹⁷

Michels now went on to delineate the specific nature of the changes in 'immortal principles' which, he found, Social Democracy had experienced. Citing the three components which he believed defined socialist ideology, he tried to demonstrate the way in which each was abandoned by the German party's political practice. The reader will recognize in Michel's discussion of socialist ideology three of the analytic constructs on which I based the radical paradigm: ideological struggle, which Michels understood as 'the presence of the long range goal'; proletarian internationalism; and class conflict.

The first concept abandoned in the process of deradicalization, according to Michels, was that of the 'far-reaching' or long-range goal. Slowly, in the party's daily life, discussion and action in terms of a broad historical purpose for the working class ceased. There remained only a struggle for immediate ends and reforms.

The more cotton-spinners, boot and shoe operators, or brush-makers the labor leader could gain each month for his union, the better versed he was in the tedious subtleties of insurance against accident and illness, the greater the industry he could display in the specialized questions of factory inspection and of arbitration in trade disputes, the better acquainted he might be with the system of checking the amount of individual purchases in co-operative stores and with the methods for the control of municipal gas, the more difficult was it for him to retain a general interest in the labor movement, even in the narrowest sense of the term... This tendency towards an exclusive and all absorbing specialization, towards the renunciation of all far-reaching outlooks, is a general characteristic of modern evolution.¹⁸

Michels characterizes reformism, in the first instance, by its total absorption in the practical and day-to-day. The concern to relate immediate to long-range ends, so as to lay a basis for the future transformation of society, is forgotten.

The second principle to vanish from reformist theory and practice, according to Michels, was internationalism. For when one cannot see beyond immediate economic and organizational tasks, to see beyond the borders of one's own nation is impossible. Perceptively, Michels focused on a major organizational difference between the First International, founded under Marx's leadership in 1864, and the Second, or New International, founded in 1889. The Old International, he wrote, citing one of its committed supporters, was strongly centralized, 'so that it might be possible, at any place at which the economic class-struggle became especially active, to throw there immediately into the scale the organized power of the working class'.¹⁹ But the New International, Michels continued,

took the form of an extremely lax system... The dread of being dominated increases in each national party in proportion as it becomes firmly established, consolidating its own existence and rendering itself independent of other socialist parties... Each national party stands on guard to prevent the other from extending their sphere of influence. The result is that the international efficiency of the resolutions voted at the international congresses is almost insignificant.²⁰

Michels wrote these rather prescient words, it might be noted, no later than 1907.

Finally, the deradicalized movement rejects the concept of class struggle itself. Labor leaders come to deny that the interests of owner and worker are in fundamental opposition. Hence, they

negate that aspect of union organization which can be used to undermine and challenge the validity of the capitalist order. By concentrating exclusively on the improvement of labor conditions, they not only put a brake on the development of class consciousness, they turn the process around, and help integrate the worker into the system. Such leaders,

...incline, as in England, to a theory in accordance with which the workers and the capitalists are to be united in a kind of league, and to share, although still unequally, in the profits of a common enterprise. Thus the wages of the laborers become dependent upon the returns of the business. This doctrine... throws a veil over all existing class antagonisms and impresses upon labor organizations a purely mercantile and technical stamp.²¹

Once the notion of class struggle is jettisoned, the very basis for a radical socialist politics dries up. For if worker and capitalist can both realize, within a system of the private ownership of wealth, fundamental economic and political interests, there is no longer any justification for trying to weaken, and then shatter, the institutional supports of that system.

Deradicalization from Michels' point of view, then, is understood as an ideological metamorphosis. Revolutionary ideas are transformed into a system of practice which negates them. Its measure is the extent to which a revolutionary movement and its leaders abandon the bulk of what Michels, in light of the three principles cited above, can be said to have defined and referred to as 'the essential content of socialism'.²²

There is a firm and unambiguous logic to Michels' analysis that stands by itself regardless of whether one accepts his general, theoretical conclusions. For there is kept always present to his frame of

reference a core set of values and ideas said to reflect the original and impetus of the movement under study. Deradicalization thus comes to be understood as, in its essence, a process of ideological absorption of the new values and political forms, by the old.

Any attempt to order theoretically the panorama of modern revolution must assume that there are constants which run through its multiple and essentially unrepeatable manifestations. If the dynamics of ideological flow, whatever their particular circuit and direction, are taken as one of these constants, then what is valid in Michels' method for the study of deradicalization in German Social Democracy can be adapted to the study of communist parties in liberal, industrially advanced societies. One of the problems in making this adaptation, however, is that the three principles which, for Michels, make up the essential content of socialism, do not comprehend what might be called, in analogous fashion, the essential content of twentieth century communism.

Michels neglected the left theorists who, even as he was making his own study, were working to refine the paradigmatic base of what was then considered a radical politics. His framework pays no attention, for example, to the concepts which Rosa Luxemburg had been hammering out since the late 1890's. Her major theoretical concern was to reconcile the tactical necessity of involvement in what she called 'practical struggle' with the maintenance of a socialist party's revolutionary aims and goals. Nor does Michels incorporate any of Lenin's ideas into his model of radicalism. Not that Michels can be faulted for this--Lenin's influence in the international socialist

movement did not begin to take hold until after the Zimmerwald conference in 1915, and did not really consolidate itself until the October revolution, when Bolshevik ideas suddenly had to be given prominence, because they seemed to have enabled a radical socialist party to come to power.²³ Yet it is impossible to delineate a model of contemporary radicalism without major reliance on both Luxemburg and Lenin.

In a sense, history, as it always does, moved beyond the analytic construction of the particular historian, in this case, Michels. There were happenings in the capitalist order for which Marxist theory made no adequate account: the transformation of industrial into corporate capitalism, the growth of the garrison state, the ability of imperialist politics of the great powers to pit national working class against national working class, and, at the same time, to pit the workers of the developed world against the impoverished of the underdeveloped, and finally, the failure of revolutionary consciousness to take hold in the minds of urbanized workers. Such factors as these meant that, for a radical Marxism to remain viable, a new architecture of socialist politics had to be raised.

Radical thinkers did not jettison Marxist theory, but attempted to incorporate the new data into its intellectual structures. Michels, perhaps because he saw no validity to the theory in any event, and, therefore, no reason to extend it, did not bother to move his eye from the old groundwork of revolutionary socialism to the new.

Michels' major contributions to contemporary political thought relate to his acumen about the tension between ideals and bureaucratic

work in organization, and his sharp insight into the problems which democratic accountability confronts in complex, hierarchical social structure. He was not particularly interested in expanding the horizons of socialist theory. Still, even the gaps in his framework are helpful, for they serve to underscore the kind of conceptual extensions that Lenin, Luxemburg, and later Gramsci, made in response to the emergence of reformist thought. Two constructs Michels simply neglected, historical materialism, and the legitimacy of force and violence. The third, ideological struggle, was an analytic extension of the notion of the long-range goal. Michels had no idea of the importance and complexity this concept would have to take on in an age of corporate advance and weakening proletarian consciousness. The following pages will develop each of these ideas further; 'ideological struggle', however, as a key organizing concept of this study, will receive, in the final section of the chapter, a more extended treatment.

a. Some Political Implications of the Notion of Historical Materialism

Michels placed too little emphasis on the materialist assumptions of revolutionary Marxist thought. An essential element in Eduard Bernstein's work, for example, is his rejection of historical materialism as the fundamental way of understanding human behavior and social change. This rejection is a key differentiating principle between radical and reformist conceptual models. As Peter Gay has written:

Bernstein never doubted that economic factors had a powerful impact on all of society, and he never questioned the fruitfulness of the Marxist concept of ideology. But he was concerned with limiting its range, and with claiming greater freedom for man's ethical thinking.²⁴

Bernstein, and reformist theory in general, according to Gay, reintroduced ethics as a causal factor into socialist political struggle.

"This view relies on voluntarism as Marxism never did."²⁵

According to Marx and Engels, basic beliefs about human nature, about the character of social relationships, and, therefore, about the meaning of justice itself, are forced into shape over historical generations by the need of an institutionalized mode of production to legitimize itself. To attain stability and consensual acceptance, social systems must develop ideologies that justify both the control over people's lives exercised by economic structures, and whatever inequalities in the distribution of wealth these structures generate. It follows that change in social consciousness cannot come about unless there is a corresponding shift in the material factors and organized social forces of which that consciousness is not only product, but, once its hegemony is established, further source. The materialist conception of history, Marx and Engels wrote,

...does not explain practice from the idea, but explains the formation of ideas from material practice; and accordingly it comes to the conclusion that all forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism... but only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations...; that not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history...²⁶

Theory alone cannot shake loose the hold which social institutions have over the minds of men and women; the masses of humanity must organize to attack those institutions at their base.

Historical materialism, in this sense, is responsible for the

overt conflict and confrontational bite that characterize so much of radical political action. One is taking on the system materially, for mass organization, and the demonstrations, campaigns, and educational programs which it sponsors and creates, themselves become, according to the concept, social forces in opposition to what exists.

Bernstein rejected the universal validity of these constructs of historical materialism. While he was prepared to accept their efficacy for earlier periods of human development, he denied their relevance for advanced industrial systems. For he believed the tremendous productivity of machine technology released human consciousness from the limiting conditions set upon it by economic scarcity.

"Modern society," he wrote in the first chapter of Evolutionary Socialism,

is much richer than earlier societies in ideologies which are not determined by economics and by nature working as an economic force. Sciences, arts, a whole series of social relations are today much less dependent on economics than formerly, or, in order to give no room for misconception, the point of economic development attained today leaves the ideological, and especially the ethical, factors greater space for independent activity than was formerly the case.²⁷

Bernstein denies that the assumptions of historical materialism apply for modern, industrial society. He is free to argue, therefore, that, within the parliamentary structures of developed capitalism, class conflict, except around limited economic aims, becomes replaced by social co-operation. Mass political attacks which threaten the constitutional order serve only to heighten social tensions that are now capable of resolution through compromise and exchange. "In a democracy," Bernstein stated,

the parties, and the classes standing behind them, soon learn to know the limits of their power, and to undertake each time only as much as they can reasonably hope to carry through under existing circumstances... The right to vote in a democracy makes its members virtual partners in the community, and this virtual partnership must in the end lead to real partnership.²⁸

The socialist polity comes about by the agreement of humane and enlightened members of all classes agreeing to work together within the institutions of a liberal political system for a just society. Once sufficient political control over government and legislature is achieved by a non-militant, but well-organized labor movement, the more conscientious of the bourgeoisie come to accept welfare measures designed for the gradual redistribution of wealth. Eventually, even the wealthiest and most stubborn of the capitalist groups are forced, by the advent of socialist legal reform, and the pressure of democratic consensus, to accept socialization of the means of production.

The contrast, here, with radical notions of the class relationship is stark. The exploitative character of the wage contract under capitalism does not disappear, the radical argues, simply because the working class can vote itself into parliamentary dominance. As long as profit is the basic principle around which production is organized, individual owners of capital will receive a disproportionate share of a nation's wealth, leaving large segments of the working class with substandard access to social necessities like housing, education, health protection, and old age care. Legislation which provides monies to meet these needs will eventually be answered by capital with declining investment, leading to high unemployment, and a shrinking national product. The alternatives which the polity

then faces will either be public control of investment decisions, or a retreat from programs of social entitlement and state-funded employment. Such a withdrawal of government support services will inevitably be followed by economic and political pressure on workers to accept lower standards of living. The only way this latter outcome can be avoided, historical materialism predicts, is if there is mass organization to resist it, and to push for the implementation of socialist solutions. This, in turn, leads to the possibility of violent confrontation between labor and capital, over the priorities and direction of the state.

b. The Legitimacy of Force and Violence

In terms of the radical paradigm, there is no reason why capitalists will not resist legislative encroachments on their former rights of ownership with every means at their disposal, including those of force, and intimidation outside the constitutional arena. It was this conviction which led radicalism to the second of the postulates overlooked by Michels, the legitimacy of force and violence. Force would probably be necessary, Lenin stated, while Luxemburg, viewing force as an ambiguous political concept, argued that the form it would take could not be known in advance.

One could not categorically deny, granted Lenin, the possibility that the owners and controllers of capital, when under legislative mandate, would acquiesce, surrender their legal right to productive wealth, and offer no unconstitutional resistance to the appropriation of their property. But, that such a situation was conceivable, had nothing to do with whether it was likely. "The working class would,

of course, prefer to take power peacefully," Lenin wrote from exile in 1899. But, he continued, to renounce the revolutionary seizure of power would be akin to madness.

It is very probable that the bourgeoisie will not make peaceful concessions to the proletariat, and at the decisive moment, will resort to violence for the defense of its privileges... (T)o limit, (therefore), the activities of a proletariat...to peaceful 'democratization' alone is arbitrarily to narrow and vulgarize the concept of working class socialism.²⁹

The conviction that resort to violence is a legitimate mode of political action, not that it is necessary or inevitable, is what, in the end, defines the radical point of view here.³⁰

By force and violence radicals are referring, at bottom, not to bullets and civil disorders and lining people up against walls, although these are certainly not excluded, but to the process itself by which the rule of one class is displaced by another. By revolution, Rosa Luxemburg told the Hanover Congress of German Social Democrats in 1899, "we do not have to mean pitchforks and bloodshed. A revolution can also take place on a cultural level." The question of "the form through which we will take power," she states, must be put aside; "that is a question about conditions which we cannot predict."³¹

Luxemburg made the point even more explicitly in her 1906 pamphlet, "The Mass Strike, The Political Party, and the Trade Unions". The revolution, she wrote again,

is something other and something more than bloodshed. In contradiction to the police interpretation, which views the revolution exclusively from the standpoint of street disturbances and rioting, that is, from the standpoint of 'disorder', the interpretation of scientific Socialism sees in the revolution above all a thorough-going internal reversal of social class relations.³²

However, it should be recognized that Luxemburg was as ready as any other radical of her era to advocate the use of violence in its most direct and immediate manifestations, if such was what she felt the times required. In December, 1918, with sharp forebodings of violence and revolution hovering in the cold, Berlin air, with a weak and unsure liberal-democratic republic trying to stabilize itself in a cultural atmosphere poisoned by the devastations and defeats of the war, Rosa Luxemburg left no ambiguity as to the method by which, now, the capitalist state would have to be overthrown. "It is sheer insanity," she wrote,

to believe that capitalists would good humoredly obey the socialist verdict of a parliament or of a national assembly, that they would calmly renounce property, profit, the right to exploit...

The imperialist capitalist class...will mobilize heaven and hell against the proletariat. It will mobilize the peasants against the cities, the backward strata of the working class against the socialist vanguard; it will use officers to instigate atrocities; it will try to paralyze every socialist measure with a thousand methods of passive resistance...it will turn the country into a smoking heap of rubble rather than voluntarily give up wage slavery... The violence of the bourgeois counter-revolution must be confronted with the revolutionary violence of the proletariat.³³

In January, Rosa Luxemburg gained empirical confirmation of her theoretical forecast. She was arrested and murdered; her body was thrown off a Berlin Bridge, into the Landwehr canal.³⁴

- 3 -

The third component of the radical paradigm which I wish to examine is that of 'ideological struggle'. It is a central principle in any attempt to assess for deradicalization.

Michels recognized the importance of 'the long range goal' to

a meaningful socialist politics. His actual discussion of the idea, however, did not penetrate the turbulent political dynamic which this notion contains. The turbulence to which I refer is the way in which a revolutionary party in a liberal state varies the content and emphasis of its program as its judgement of the nature of existing economic and political conditions varies. If a revolutionary situation is felt to be crystallizing, or a working class seen as becoming, for whatever reasons, more militant, statements accenting the incompatibility of capital and labor intensify. Tactics lean towards confrontation, boycotting, setting up of dual organizations, and direct action. If political and economic tensions recede, policy formulation comes to use less directly the language of class struggle; program, to focus more on reforms with which the capitalist system can live; and tactics, to move towards alliance with liberal groups and participation in liberal political institutions. The problem for a theory of radical politics in all of this is precisely to take cognizance of how, despite tactical change, socialist values and long-range goals can remain continuously infused into the practice of a Marxist party.

Michels did not deal with this question. But the radicals in the German Social Democratic Party did. They had to, for in the 1890's the German economy was doing well, and as a result, the radical theorists of the time, Carl Schorske points out,

...themselves recognized the non-revolutionary character of the period, and accepted the necessity of a reformist tactic... In an optimistic era, the burden of proof that prosperity could not last fell upon the radicals.

Under such conditions, if a socialist party were to retain radical

substance, something more was demanded than just its day to day involvement in political action. There had to be introduced into immediate political activity awareness of the values and long-range goals this activity ostensibly had as its ultimate purpose.

The paradox of Social Democracy at the turn of the century was that its materialistic philosophy had to be sustained largely by an idealistic attitude, while the new idealistic heresy battered on labor's material gains. The orthodox Marxists saw as their chief function the infusion of the 'sozialistischer Geist' into the proletariat and the labor movement.³⁵

The point is crucial. In the 25 years from the Erfurt program to the collapse of the Second International, radical social-democrats came to insist that long-range goals and explicitly sharpened theory had to be an open part of all agitation, and provide a conscious background for all tactical action.

Reliance upon theoretical reading of immediate political behavior, that is, the notion of an inseparable tie between practical and ideological struggle, began to distinguish radical, as opposed to reformist, modes of political thought and practice. "(T)he light of theory must be cast upon every separate fact," Lenin wrote in 1900. "... (W)hat is it in our day to day struggles that makes us a socialist party?" Rosa Luxemburg asked the Stuttgart Congress of the Social-Democrats in 1898. "It can only be the relation between...practical struggles and our final goals. It is the final goal alone which constitutes the spirit and the content of our socialist struggle, which turns it into a class struggle." Both of these statements were conscious challenges to Bernstein's dictum that 'what is usually called 'the final aim of socialism' is nothing.' In the Preface to Evolutionary Socialism Bernstein insisted upon the point. "My thoughts

and efforts are concerned with the duties of the present and nearest future," he wrote, "and I only busy myself with perspectives beyond so far as they give me a line of conduct for suitable action now."³⁶

In the early 1900's, as they searched for concepts with which to oppose reformist political ideology, both Lenin and Luxemburg came to stress the notion that radical activity was defined by the extent to which it encountered people on the broadest level of ideas about social change, not by the relation of agitation and organization to immediate ends alone. One used immediate issues to build upon, of course, and the winning of reforms which improved the quality of life of the working class was important in its own right. But such issues were fulcra, against which the theoretical principles of historical materialism and class struggle could be pressed, and inserted into day to day political action. These larger concerns had to be kept alive and present to the intellect of working people. For only then, radicals believed, could workers shape the disparate events of their lives into a coherent whole, connecting those events in such a way as to reveal a patterned theoretical tapestry. Only then, could workers begin to come to grips with the nature of their general position in society.

The difficulty, as far as radical theorists were concerned, was that there existed, within the Marxist canon, no developed theory of the procedures and mechanisms by which such a program of educational struggle could be carried out. "(I)t must be admitted," Lenin wrote in 1901, just prior to the appearance of What Is To Be Done, "that we have not yet solved this question of the character and methods of struggle fundamental for a party of practical activity, that it still

gives rise to serious differences of opinion which reveal a deplorable ideological instability and vacillation." ³⁷ It was clear to radical socialist thinkers that, whatever the actual, long range situation of the industrial laboring classes vis-a-vis their lack of control over the means of production, resistance to radical consciousness would vary directly as working people's belief in the system varied. To the extent workers felt they could attain material security and political impact within the capitalist order, to that extent they would hold back from identifying with revolutionary alternatives.

It was in order to deal with this problem of the stagnation of proletarian consciousness that Lenin and Luxemburg, in the years preceding World War I, each working independently of the other, found themselves developing the ideas that would mature into the theory of ideological struggle. The key components of this notion soon came to be defined as education and leadership. For, the theory argued, working people could, in general, begin to examine and re-assess the condition of their lives only if fundamental questions were raised, and introduced to them, by others in their world whom they trusted, and whose intellectual and political direction they might thus be willing to make their own. As Lenin wrote,

...the task of Social-Democracy is to bring definite socialist ideals to the spontaneous working class movement, to connect this movement with socialist convictions that should attain the level of contemporary science, to connect it with the regular struggle for democracy as a means of achieving socialism. ³⁸

Education and leadership, Lenin made clear in What Is To Be Done, were an inseparable part of this process.

...not only must Social Democrats not confine themselves exclusively to the economic struggle, but... they must not allow the organization of economic exposures to become the predominant part of their activities. We must take up actively the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness.³⁹

The entire thrust of radical political activity, whether it be the organization of a strike, the staging of a demonstration, or the publication of an illegal socialist newspaper, must, from Lenin's point of view, have always as its determining end the development of greater class consciousness and deeper theoretical comprehension in the minds of working people.

Lenin's notion of leadership has tempted some to charge him with having intellectual contempt for the working class. "... (W) here- as Marx had believed in the spontaneous growth of working class consciousness under the impact of capitalist realities," Alfred G. Meyer has written, "Lenin tended to assume that the workingman was forever doomed to insufficient consciousness."⁴⁰ Meyer, however, has either misread the Communist Manifesto, or, at best, used the concept of spontaneity in a misleading way here. For Marx and Engels were convinced, as textual analysis will show, that vanguard education and leadership which came from out of the bourgeois classes was absolutely essential to the development of revolutionary consciousness among working people. Lenin was building upon Marx and Engels in this respect, not departing from them.

It is in The Communist Manifesto that the idea of the vanguard as educator makes its appearance. For the task of enabling the working class to realize what are, according to Marxist theory, its objective interests under capitalism, falls, in this work, to a dis-

affected and angry intelligentsia, whose roots lie in the upper and middle classes. To this group, "the process of dissolution going on within the whole range of old society assumes such a violent glaring character," that it, "cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class...

...a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and, in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole...⁴¹

These theorists, and all in society who begin to respond politically to their ideas, come to form the leadership of the revolutionary movement, the vanguard. Full class consciousness comes into being only as consequence of the interaction of this vanguard with the proletariat as a whole. The vanguard is a subjective, conscious, interventionist element, key members of which will come out of various bourgeois strata.

Lenin's famous statement from What Is To Be Done? that "the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness,"⁴² carries with it no necessary implication that the workingman is 'forever doomed to insufficient consciousness'. Quite the contrary.

No one expects a poorly educated working person to acquire a knowledge of physics or biology without the intervention of theoretically advanced instructors. The workings of society are hardly less complex than those of the physical and organic worlds. Yet, here, it is often assumed that knowledge of political and economic structures, and the collective interests resulting therefrom, can be attained through intuition. What Lenin, and radicals in general, are trying

to argue, on the other hand, is that neither the condition of being exploited, nor the mechanisms through which exploitation is maintained, are self-evident. Indeed, they cannot be self-evident, for, if they were, they would cease to exist as stable social elements.

What follows from this line of analysis is that no disadvantaged group in society will become fully aware of its own situation without the inputs of theory and education. These will not emerge unless there is a political leadership which has come to perceive previously unrecognized mechanisms of control and exploitation in society, is committed to overturning them, and is sensitive to existing levels of understanding among the dominated classes. This is the role a radical Marxism legitimately believes the vanguard will play.

"It is the task of Social-Democracy," Lenin wrote,

to develop the political consciousness of the masses, and not to drag along at the tail-end of the masses that have no political rights; secondly, and this is most important, it is untrue that the masses will not understand the idea of political struggle...

...Even the most backward worker will understand the idea, provided, of course, the agitator or propagandist is able to approach him in such a way as to communicate the idea to him, to explain it in understandable facts the worker knows from everyday experience.⁴³

Whatever else he or she may be, and whatever Bolshevik practice eventually produced, the radical organizer's original self-concept is that of teacher, and model for change.

Rosa Luxemburg shared with Lenin the conviction that radical activity had to be marked by the attempt, on the part of socialist leadership, to reach and raise the consciousness of working people.

"The great socialist significance of the trade-union and parliamentary

struggles," Luxemburg wrote in her 1899 pamphlet, Reform or Revolution, "is that through them the awareness, the consciousness of the proletariat becomes socialized, and it is organized as a class."

And then, a page or so later:

It is not true that socialism will arise automatically and under all circumstances from the daily struggle of the working class. Socialism will be the consequence only of the ever growing contradictions of capitalist economy and the comprehension by the working class of the unavailability of the suppression of these contradictions through a social transformation...⁴⁴

Luxemburg, I will show, was critical of what she felt was in Lenin an excessive emphasis on centralist direction. But, with her revolutionary colleague, she believed that theory and direction had nevertheless to be constantly brought to the proletariat, and a center of vanguard leadership, composed of both radical intellectuals and theoretically developed workers, maintained at all times. "What the masses lack is general enlightenment," Luxemburg told a Party School in 1908, "the theory which gives us the possibility of systematizing the hard facts and forging them into a deadly weapon to use against our opponents."⁴⁵

Luxemburg was as committed as any full scale Leninist to the notion of vanguard direction and leadership. "To give the slogan, to determine the direction of the struggle, to so direct the tactics of the political conflict," she wrote in the Junius pamphlet, that

...the Social Democracy...shall never be weaker than is justified by the actual power at its back, but shall rather hasten in advance of its actual power, that is the important problem of the party leadership in a great historical crisis.⁴⁶

Luxemburg is often contrasted with Lenin around this issue of 'giving leadership', as if she did not share Lenin's concept of the Communist

party as a vanguard. But on these crucial points of the role of ideological struggle, and of the radical movement's standing before the proletariat as whole, possessed of advanced understanding and acumen, the two revolutionaries shared a common view.

Luxemburg was most critical of the Bolsheviks around their notions of organizational structure, and the manner in which one gave leadership and fought to develop consciousness among the masses. As early as 1904 Luxemburg had been uncomfortable with what she felt was Lenin's desire to over-centralize the control of party decision-making.⁴⁷ But she became particularly critical of Lenin's notion of leadership after the Bolshevik revolution itself. "...Socialism in life demands a complete spiritual transformation in the masses degraded by centuries of bourgeois class rule," she wrote in her essay, The Russian Revolution.

Social instincts in place of egotistical ones, mass initiative in place of inertia... No one knows this better, describes it more penetratingly; repeats it more stubbornly than Lenin. But he is completely mistaken in the means he employs. Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconic penalties, rule by terror--all these things are but palliatives. The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion. It is rule by terror which demoralizes...⁴⁸

Still, it should be acknowledged that the polemics which Luxemburg directed against the Bolsheviks were carried out within the framework of revolutionary support and solidarity. "The party of Lenin," she concluded in her discussion of the Bolshevik revolution, was "the only one in Russia which grasped the true interest of the revolution," the only one "which carried on a socialist policy. The faults of the Bolsheviks were grave, Luxemburg wrote, but they had to be understood

in historical context. "The Bolsheviks," she said, "have shown that they are capable of everything a genuine revolutionary party can contribute within the limit of historical possibilities."⁴⁹

Lenin and Luxemburg, whatever their differences as to the role of organization, and the danger of bureaucratic deterioration, agreed that the explicit projection of class-struggle theory as constant background to immediate program, was essential to the character of radical political life. In their view, organization and structure, and even the revolutionary seizure of state institutions, set the conditions for the transformation of consciousness: they did not guarantee its appearance.

Still, there were limits to the extent to which these two revolutionary theorists developed the notion of struggle on the immediate level. The times in which they lived forced their thought to move beyond Marx in relation to the idea of how one acted and chose, as one fought to reach and transform the understanding of those with whom one lived and worked. Yet, given the complexity of this process of intervention into consciousness, and the unending variety of activities in which they were caught up, Lenin and Luxemburg, themselves, went only so far in their analyses of day-to-day practice, and in their theories of its specific content.

I will put the idea somewhat differently. "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways," Marx wrote in the famous aphorism from the "Theses on Feurbach"; "the point, however, is to change it."⁵⁰ Thus did Marx propose to turn the ideal into a weapon against the real; the subject into a power over the object; the conceptual into a tool for reshaping the actual. He asserted,

in other words, an existential connection between theory and practice-- between the effort to comprehend the structures and dynamics of society, and the effort to overturn and master them. But while Marx insisted on the relation of theory to practice, bringing to fruition the sense of modernity that had begun under the batterings of early industrialism, he left undeveloped, over the entire course of his work, a critical factor. He offered no theory of practice.

Grant, for a moment, the validity of this fifth assumption in the proposed model of radical theory--the notion that if a politics of radical change is to have impact, it must be prepared to come into open ideological conflict, through the mass organization of a vanguard movement, with the very populations it is trying to lead. Marx and Engels, perhaps because they expected class consciousness to emerge naturally and easily out of the contact between vanguard and proletariat, paid little attention, except in the most general terms, to the modes of action through which the struggle to loosen the hold of dominant ideologies over workers' understanding would take place. From a reading of Marx and Engels, in their more provocative, agitational works, it might seem that one just goes among the industrial proletariat, mobilizes the growing discontent bred by the worsening of their conditions, turns it, by means of various programs, strategies, and political strikes, against the state, and eventually makes a revolution. Perhaps, in the heat of the political upheavals of the mid-nineteenth century, it did not seem necessary to be any more specific.

Marxist theory, as both Lenin and Luxemburg came to recognize in the eighteen-nineties, offered no extended discussion of the principles of intervention by which workers might come to hear, accept, and, finally,

internalize, the assumptions and values of a socialist world-view.

It gave no practical content to the notion of struggle. How does one 'struggle'? What are the conceptual bases for the small-scale decisions and choices that one must make in the daily drama of carrying out a political life? How, within the context of a larger movement, does one use oneself in order to precipitate change of ideological conviction? How does the activist respond to the social and personal conflicts which arise out of practice, so that people learn to see themselves and their world in different ways, begin to re-orient their systems of social belief, and move towards new patterns of behavior and action?

Ideological struggle is here seen as a process by which new ideas take root in the understanding of a given population. It is more, therefore, than just the mechanical projection of revolutionary theory, and radical slogans, in leaflets and newspapers, at union meetings, and on street corners. It is, rather, the actual conflict and confrontation of opposed idea systems.

Lenin and Luxemburg broke new ground in their efforts to uncover the workings of such ideological confrontation, and to develop principles by which it might be guided. But they left gaps, unanswered questions, uncharted areas.

Antonio Gramsci carried much of this work forward. It is as if, in The Prison Notebooks, he brings to the surface insights, details, and specifics only implied in the general formulations put together by Lenin and Luxemburg.

Any attempt to elucidate a concept of 'ideological struggle' is incomplete unless it incorporates at least some of Gramsci's ideas. I will conclude this discussion of the conceptual connection

between ideology and radical practice, therefore, with a brief look at some of the ways in which Gramsci tried to break it down.

By February of 1929, when Gramsci begins to put together the writings and letters which become The Prison Notebooks, he has been in Fascist jails for over two years. Ironically free from the mandates of Stalinist dogma, discipline, and persecution, he develops Marxist theories of action and struggle in terms other than those insisted upon by the Comintern.

In his cell, Gramsci thinks about the interplay of ideology and consciousness, and how it is that dominant value systems exercise so much force over the mental life of the dominated. What was the process at work here? Of what did the radical vanguard have to take account, if it were to succeed in its assault on the institutions and ethics of liberal individualism?

There are three concepts which Gramsci put together that help give detail and depth to the idea of what ideological struggle is: what it is, particularly, that it sets out to accomplish, and what factors must be present, if its goals are to be effectively realized. The first is the concept of 'organic intellectual'. The second is the concept of internal ideological conflict. And both are developed through the intellectual construct of 'hegemony'.

Gramsci began the Prison Notebooks with a discussion of the social mechanisms through which the ruling classes propagated their ideas. Every society created strata whose very means of livelihood, whose primary social function, was to reproduce and re-enforce the values of the prevailing ideology, and the structures which embodied them. These

groups Gramsci referred to as 'the intellectuals'.

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.⁵¹

All societies have such key institutional groupings. The dominant system of social values and directions which it is their job to maintain and constantly re-create, Gramsci refers to as the hegemonic system. It is a set of values, concepts, and reward structures which, in the case of class-divided societies, are geared to convince subordinate classes of the validity of their own subordination. The classic example of the hegemonic intellectual, writes Gramsci, is the ecclesiastic, "who for a long time...held a monopoly of a number of important services: religious ideology, that is, the philosophy and science of the age, together with schools, education, morality, justice, charity, good works, etc."⁵²

As societies become more modern and complex, so do the methods and forms by which these societies bring subject populations to accept and internalize hegemonic values. Where once the priest and sheriff were adequate to maintain the ideological equilibrium of society, for example, modernization so shattered and dispersed the loci of their roles, that an almost infinite variety of offices, professions, and administrative bureaucracies became necessary to carry them out.

'Hegemony' is formally conceptualized by Gramsci in the following manner:

1. The "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent

confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position...in the world of production.

'Political government' refers to those means which a society brings into play when assent and consensus fail to do their job.

2. The apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed.⁵³

'Hegemony' thus becomes the major instrument of social control. The more thoroughly a society can get its masses uncritically to accept institutions which restrict and exploit them, the less will it have to rely upon its armies to keep order; the more will its structures be stable, and the more, will its leaders be secure.

Typically, the common people of a society are pulled in two directions. Authority teaches them that their low place is a function of their own inadequacies, and that the good man does not challenge the natural order. On the other hand, the laborers themselves can sense no innate qualities which mark them as inferior. In consequence, dominated populations often develop two faces: one for their 'betters', and one for the times they are among themselves, when they feel free to express their resentment and contempt. Beneath it all, there is a confusion and anger which comes out in stories and traditions and social archetypes that challenge the accepted wisdom: the slave who is smarter than his master; the jester who is wiser than the king; the poor man who is finer in spirit than those for whom he labors.

A radical movement has only one recourse: it must build upon the native skepticism of the laboring classes, and consistently work to undermine the legitimacy of the prevailing value system. It can

only do this through the articulation of its own ideological premises and directions. But if the articulation and development of the dominant ideology requires intellectuals who are organically related to the ruling groups, then the articulation of revolutionary ideology requires intellectuals who are organically related to the ruled.

"All men are intellectuals," says Gramsci; "but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals." 'Intellectual' is a social category, not a special quality of refinement. Manual and intellectual labor are not distinct modes of social being. "Each man... carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a 'philosopher', an artist, a man of taste," Gramsci writes; each "participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct." Each man, therefore, "contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it."⁵⁴ The function of a radical movement must be to elicit new conceptual and moral responses from the laboring population.

Workers do not understand fully the sources of the restrictions which capital, in a system based upon the maximization of private wealth, places on the conditions of their daily life. But once 'free' labor--as opposed to slave or tenant or apprenticed or indentured labor--becomes the legal basis for the creation of surplus, the working classes almost automatically seek some form of political and/or economic control over the social forces at work on them. "The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity," writes Gramsci.

...His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in

his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed.⁵⁵

The character of the philosophical life of working people is conditioned by these opposing pulls on their intellect and on their feeling. The goal of radical practice is to penetrate, in immediate and specific ways, the very process by which common people, as Gramsci put it, 'philosophize'.

In Gramsci, the double-level on which Marxist theory always assumed ideological struggle had to operate is made explicit. The two levels on which the effort to transform awareness must occur may be described as the public and the personal, the social and the individual, the external and the internal, the general and the particular, the objective and the subjective. Yet these spheres are not conceived as separate and distinct, as dichotomies, with clear lines of demarcation between them. They interpenetrate and merge with one another; they are simply different aspects of the same unifying reality: human consciousness. Or one might say that they are expressions of one part of the common species-reality, rendered from different modes, perspectives, positions, points of view. The existing vocabulary for capturing these areas of direct, felt experience is weak. One approaches them tangentially, with whatever words, phrases, concepts the prevailing language makes available.

The struggle to overturn hegemony eventuates on two levels. The public, social, external level is composed of the institutional and political clashes which materially reflect, make concrete, actualize the idea-systems and philosophies of the economic classes in fundamental

contradiction. This mode of struggle is organized and led by the respective organic intellectuals of each class, whose job it is to socialize, to educate, to mold, to give experiential meaning to the concepts and values which express the interests of the classes in conflict. This, one might say, is the struggle for objective hegemony in society. Under modern conditions, it is a struggle in which the subordinate classes cannot succeed, unless its organic leadership coalesce in a political party.

One should stress the importance and significance which, in the modern world, political parties have in the elaboration and diffusion of conceptions of the world, because essentially what they do is to work out the ethics and the politics corresponding to these conceptions and act, as it were, as their historical 'laboratory'. The parties recruit individuals out of the working mass, and the selection is made on practical and theoretical criteria at the same time...56

The public level of struggle is expressed in the open clash between two ways of viewing the world, as each group, through collective institutions and political organization, resists, and attempts to overwhelm the other.

But there is a struggle for subjective hegemony as well. For the clash of ideologies is projected into the specific consciousness of each worker, precisely because there is no clearly defined point at which the public passes into the personal, the social becomes the individual, the general is transformed into the particular. We are all different from one another, since individual heredity and immediate environmental experience are never identical; but for all of that, we are still extensions of the world into which we are born. Thus workers, caught up in the contradiction between their experience of powerlessness, and their attachment to the society which dominates them internalize

the debate between ideological systems.

Critical understanding of self takes place..through a struggle of political 'hegemonies' and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality.⁵⁷

The worker exposed to the public clash of ideologies repeats the conflict on the personal, particular, subjective level. Radicalism, in that sense, must be able to reach inside individual consciousness, and impel the dynamics of inner, intellectual struggle away from the lines of social force that draw them towards the existing, external, controlling hegemony.

In his extended concerns and discussions of the mechanisms through which activism must move in order to meet the minimum conditions necessary for achieving internal change in consciousness, Gramsci enriched the theory of ideology. To go into his ideas on this subject in depth, which are most fully explored in the early pages of that portion of The Prison Notebooks entitled "The Study of Philosophy"⁵⁸, would take me far beyond the scope of this study. Here, I am interested in pointing up only two aspects of Gramsci's analysis. The first is the way in which he re-enforces the notion of ideological struggle as a contest in which two sets of ideas confront and oppose on another. The second is his focus on the way in which the struggle over idea systems must occur on internal levels of consciousness, as well as external ones. This insight will prove essential in comprehending the nature of the change in the character of political struggle, as the world Communist movement moved from the leadership of Lenin, to that of Stalin. For it is around the concept and importance of internal shift of ideological conviction that radical practice eventually divides, and undermines itself.

I have tried, in this section, to give a brief survey of the development of the concept of ideological struggle in the work of the major Marxian activist-theorists of the early twentieth century. The concern with this notion came out of the larger attempt to identify a radical paradigm as such. In the next section, I will briefly review the paradigm, then try to show the way in which the concept of ideological struggle permits one to distinguish empirically between a radical, and a reformist politics.

- 4 -

This chapter, using as sources major theorists of socialism of the early twentieth century, has touched upon five principles which, I said earlier, would be considered defining elements of a radical Marxist political movement and ideology. Let me state these basics of a radical ideology once again. They are: 1) historical materialism; 2) class conflict; 3) proletarian internationalism; 4) the legitimacy of force and violence; 5) ideological struggle, carried on through vanguard organization, as the overt and public context of strategy. I suggest this as an open and flexible listing of the major conceptual components which are entailed by the term 'class consciousness'.

The last proposition has a somewhat different status than the others, for it plays a special methodological role in the assessment of de-radicalization. Agitation for reform, and for all other types of limited political change, the principle asserts, takes on radical meaning, becomes radical, only to the extent that it attaches to a larger ideological framework, one expressing the basic constructs and values of revolutionary consciousness. The latter notion I have tried to define, in paradigmatic form, above. Since ideological grounding does not appear of itself in social practice, a mediating social element, activist and interventionist, is required. Radicalism presupposes, therefore, the existence of an organized movement or

party which uses all possible instruments of political education and/or propaganda to relate immediate activity to the over-all theory of revolutionary socialism. Such action is what is meant by 'ideological struggle'.

The element of ideological struggle is crucial to any concept of radicalism. For, in societies where the legitimacy of capitalism is accepted by the great majority of workers, or in times when labor solidarity and organizational growth is under attack, radical movements will, in general, be forced to focus on the fight for reforms. The alternative, usually, is for these movements to risk losing whatever warranty or sanction they do possess among a society's working people. In order to remain viable, therefore, they will mute their concern with programs and actions requiring direct confrontation with the capitalist system. Under these conditions, the only empirical circumstance which can identify a political practice as radical is the character of the ideological dynamic by which that practice is consciously environed.

I cannot make this point strongly enough, and I ask the reader to keep it before his or her mind throughout the entire study to follow: local and immediate struggle for restricted social change is not the unique and special province of reformist parties and movements. The small, daily, grinding routine of organizational work--the knocking on doors, the gripe sessions during lunch or over a beer, the endless meetings to plan a campaign, the wait for volunteers who never show up, the running off of leaflets, the boredom of preparing a mailing--are as inherent to radical politics as they are to the politics of reform. In the last analysis, it is the

ideological context of action which distinguishes the two.

All major theorists of revolutionary practice placed emphasis on the fight for reforms as a mode of precipitating class consciousness. "As for Lenin," Ralph Miliband reminds us, "his whole work is permeated by firm approval for the struggle for partial reforms of every sort"; Lenin's writings are "peppered with contemptuous denunciations of the all-or-nothing approach to the revolutionary struggle, culminating in Left-Wing Communism--An Infantile Disorder of 1920."⁵⁹

In the Inaugural Address of the First International, Marx singled out two aspects of British reform as being essential for the eventual liberation of the working classes: the Ten Hours' Bill, and the Co-Operative Movement. He spoke, for example, of the "immense physical, moral, and intellectual benefits...accruing to the factory operatives" as a result of the Ten Hours' Legislation. In comparison, however, the Co-Operative Movement was an even "still greater victory of the political economy of labor over the political economy of property...

The value of these great social experiments cannot be over-rated. By deed, instead of by argument, they have shown that production on a large scale, and in accord with the behests of modern science, may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands;...and that, like slave labor, like serf labor, hired labor is but a transitory and inferior form, destined to disappear before associated labor plying its toil with a willing hand.

But the limitation which Marx saw in these reforms is also telling.

For, he wrote,

however excellent in principle, and however useful in practice, co-operative labor, if kept within the narrow circle of the casual efforts of private workmen, will never be able to arrest the growth in geometrical progression of monopoly, to free the masses, nor even to perceptibly lighten the burden of their miseries...To save to be developed to national dimensions, and consequently to be fostered by national means.⁶⁰
to be fostered by national means.⁶⁰

Let me propose this as an example of revolutionary practice at work. There is an acceptance and support of reform, with recognition of the advance it brings to the quality of life of working people. But there is, as well, emphasis on reform's limitations, and an insistence that it be related to the need for re-ordering the system as a whole.

Ideological perspective is the key distinction between radical and reformist political practice, not the single-minded urging of insurrection on the part of the former, as opposed to the tactics of gradualism on the part of the latter. Except in times of heightened social instability when a program of direct insurrection may appear plausible, a radical movement will be inextricably involved with the immediate and day to day. The only tie it will then have to radical content and direction is its underlying theoretical perspective, and long-range philosophical intent. The point is that perspective and intent have no meaning if they are not visible.

One cannot hold one's goals and philosophy hidden in one's heart and mind, as I suggested earlier, and expect that people will understand that one is, really, underneath it all, a revolutionary. There must be overtly present, in programs, platforms, campaigns, movement literature of all sorts, arguments which relate particular struggle to the notion that the interests of capital and labor are fundamentally opposed. A model of radical theory must be articulate and visible as backdrop to reform action at all times.

On the logic here laid out, it is the absence of a publicly presented campaign around, first, long-range goals and values, and, secondly, the theoretical assumptions of class struggle, that in-

dicade a deradicalized movement. Thus, in the empirical chapters of Parts II and III, I will be mainly concerned with the interplay between the specifics and determinateness of daily action, and the broader ideological structures into which that action--indistinguishable, out of context, from the action of any reform movement--is set.

The research, in the body of the dissertation to follow, will concentrate on the ways in which the American Communist party openly expressed, or neglected to express, concepts of class struggle, historical materialism, legitimacy of force and violence, and other elements of the proposed radical paradigm, in its day to day practice. Reformist practice, in and of itself, will not be used to indicate a deradicalized political movement. In this sense, I believe, the American Communist party does not become deradicalized until after the reelection of Roosevelt in November of 1936. But that is for later chapters to demonstrate, chapters which will have the theoretical framework of this section as constant conceptual referent.

I want to point out, finally, that what I take, here, is not a traditional approach to the study of Communist radicalism. Ideology and ideological practice are often dismissed as irrelevant to the uncovering of true radical intent on the part of Communists. Their radicalism, in this understanding, is portrayed as some sort of hidden and secret activity, which becomes visible only by stripping away the layers of what they are saying publicly about their ideas. The following study reverses that entire notion. What is being thrown away in this search for 'true' radicalism, I contend, is the essence of radical activity itself.

In the study of the inner politics of Stalinist organization one will uncover conspiracy, dissemblance, manipulation, and deceit. But those activities are not what make a Communist party radical. They are what make it Stalinist, a concept I will explore more fully in the next chapter. I believe that, as political configurations, the two may co-exist, though not without contradiction, in the same movement. But they are hardly synonymous.

The problem, now, is to look more deeply into this political phenomenon which some have come to identify as 'Stalinism' and which, they argue, has given shape and definition to all Communist parties since the mid-twenties. In the chapter to follow I will try to find evidence for the existence of this phenomenon in the historical record, and suggest its particular relation, as movement and ideology, to the process of deradicalization.⁶¹

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

¹By 'progressive movement' I am referring to the loose affiliation of groups and organizations which, during the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties in this country, came to believe that some form of a socialized economy, and some form of social planning, were essential for the further development of democratic values in the twentieth century. Those identifying as progressives could range, in some cases, all the way from liberal Republicans--usually from urban centers in the Northeast--to Communists, and Communist sympathizers.

At best, the elements of the progressive movement lived together in uneasy alliance. For the movement suffered division not only in terms of the differences between liberals and Communists, but in terms of varying liberal attitudes towards sharing a common frame of political reference with Communists. Thus, Frank A. Warren, in his study of the progressives of the thirties, classifies liberal groups precisely by how they viewed the Communists:

Broadly speaking, the left wing liberals of the thirties fell into three groups, though these categories are by no means exact... I have called these groups the fellow-travellers, the Russian sympathizers, and the anti-Communist liberals. I am not altogether satisfied with these labels, which are used with no invidious intent and with no suggestion of any lack of intellectual integrity. But some kind of classification is necessary for purposes of analysis...

Warren also asserts, however, that all in this movement were linked by a generalized ideological commitment to social planning. Among the movement's intellectual leaders, he points out, were Bruce Bliven and George Soule, editors of the New Republic, Alfred Bingham, an editor of The Nation, and John Dewey. Warren uses the work of these men to bring out and discuss the tenets which then held the broad notion of a 'left' together.

Despite differences in their views, especially in regard to Communism, when Bliven, Soule, Bingham and Dewey had finished re-interpreting liberalism, one central fact stood out: the need for collective planning... (I)mplicit within (their) writings was the belief that public ownership of the major industries was both desirable and necessary.

See Frank A. Warren, Liberals and Communism (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1966), pp. 5, 32-33

²George Woodard, "What Ails Socialism," Monthly Review 5 (January 1954): 445-446

³Los Angeles Subscriber, "No Short Cuts," Monthly Review 6 (May 1954): 14. At this time, many contributors to the discussion sections of the Review asked that their communications be published anonymously.

⁴Ronald Radosh, "American Radicalism: Liberal or Socialist?" Monthly Review 14 (February 1963): 566

⁵Robert Forrey, "American Radicalism: A Reply to Mr. Radosh," Monthly Review 14 (March 1963): 621-622

⁶Max Gordon, "The Communist Party of the Nineteen Thirties and the New Left," and James Weinstein, "Response," Socialist Revolution 6 (January-March 1976): 31

⁷Ibid., p. 28

⁸Ibid., p. 55

⁹Ibid., p. 57

¹⁰Ralph Miliband, Marxism and Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 40

¹¹Gordon, p. 30

¹²If I exclude Mao Ze Dong and Trotsky from the model to be presented, it is because an adequate comprehension of their thought requires the exploration of historical conditions that lie beyond the scope of this work. Mao's concern with ideological transformation is, of course, directly relevant to the notion of radicalism being developed here. Yet, to do his vision full justice, one would have to examine it against the background of peasant based movements in underdeveloped and colonially exploited nations.

I leave Trotsky aside because of the way in which his contributions to radical theory are tied into the fatal polemics and political struggles which surround the emergence of a Bolshevik opposition after Lenin's death. It was out of this opposition that Trotsky elaborated his critiques both of the doctrine of socialism in one country, and of the Soviet bureaucracy. To weave his concepts into the following narrative would take me too far afield, without changing, substantially, the character of the paradigm to be developed.

¹³For a brief biography of Michels, see Philip J. Cook, "Robert Michels' Political Parties in Perspective," The Journal of Politics 33 (August, 1971): 773:784

¹⁴Eduard Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism (New York: Schocken Books, 1961)

¹⁵Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology (New York: International Publishers, 1947; New World Paperback edition, 1963), p. 14

¹⁶Robert Michels, Political Parties, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Dover Press, 1959)

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 187

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 188 *Italics added*

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 194 Michels is citing, here, Gustave Jaechh, Die Internationale, Leipz, Buchdr., Akt. Ges., Leipzig, 1904, p. 218

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 194-195

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 306

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 210, 212

²³See Helmut Gruber, International Communism in the Era of Lenin (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1972; Anchor Books edition), Introduction, pp. 1-8

²⁴Peter Gay, The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1970; Collier Books edition), p. 170

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶ Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, pp. 28-29

²⁷ Bernstein, pp. 15-16

²⁸ Ibid., p. 144

²⁹ V. I. Lenin, "A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social Democracy," Collected Works, Vol. 4: 1898-April, 1901 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972)

³⁰ Bernstein's rejection of the legitimacy of force and violence follows logically from his rejection of historical materialism. "Feudalism," he writes, "with its unbending organization and corporations, had to be destroyed nearly everywhere by violence. The liberal organizations of modern society are distinguished from those exactly because they are flexible, and capable of change and development. They do not need to be destroyed, but only further developed." (Bernstein, p. 164)

³¹ Rosa Luxemburg, "Speech to the Hanover Congress, (1899)" Selected Political Writings, ed. by Dick Howard (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 49

³² Rosa Luxemburg, The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions (New York: Harper and Row, 1971; Torchbook edition), p. 49

³³ Luxemburg, "What Does the Spartacus League Want?" Selected Writings, pp. 370-371

³⁴ Elzbieta Ettinger, Comrade and Lover, Rosa Luxemburg's letters to Leo Jogiches (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1979), p. 192 Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered the night of January 15, 1919. Four and one-half months later, on May 31, Luxemburg's body washed to the bank of the river.

³⁵ Carl E. Schorske, German Social-Democracy, 1905-1917 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965; Science editions), pp. 20, 23

³⁶ Lenin, "Draft Declaration of Iskra and Zarya," Collected Works, p. 326; Luxemburg, Selected Writings, p. 39; and Bernstein, p. xxix

In concluding her speech, Luxemburg attacked Bernstein directly. "The conquest of political power remains the final goal," she said, "and that final goal remains the soul of the struggle. The working class cannot take the decadent position of the philosophers: 'The final goal is nothing to me, the movement is everything'. No, on the contrary, without relating the movement to the final goal, the movement as an end in itself is nothing to me, the final goal is everything." (Luxemburg, p. 43. Italics added.)

³⁷Lenin, "Where to Begin," Collected Works, vol. 5: May 1901-February 1902, p. 17

³⁸Lenin, "Our Immediate Task," Collected Works, p. 217

³⁹Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?" Selected Works, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 135

⁴⁰Alfred G. Meyer, Leninism, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1967), p. 31

⁴¹Marx and Engels, Selected Works, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), "Communist Manifesto," p. 117

⁴²Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?" Selected Works, vol. 1, p. 114

⁴³Lenin, "Apropos of the Profession de Foi," Collected Works, vol. 4, p. 29

⁴⁴Luxemburg, "Social Reform or Revolution," Selected Writings, pp. 186, 188. Italics added to second citation.

⁴⁵Luxemburg, Ibid., "Speech to the Nuremberg Congress (1908)," pp. 381, 383

⁴⁶Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamphlet," in The Mass Strike, p. 201

⁴⁷Idem, "Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy," p. 306

⁴⁸Idem, The Russian Revolution (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976), pp. 70-71; 77-78

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 78-79

⁵⁰Marx, Karl, "Theses on Feurbach" in Selected Works, Volume One (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), p. 15

⁵¹Gramsci, Antonio, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (New York: International Publishers, 1978), p. 5

⁵²Ibid., p. 7

⁵³Ibid., p. 12

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 9

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 333

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 335

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 333

⁵⁸I have, up to this point, given no explicit definition of the term 'socialism,' although it is a term I have used freely throughout this Chapter, and will continue to use throughout the dissertation. While there is no more a fixed and final definition of 'socialism' than there is of 'radicalism', some public frame of reference is required. I will rely, therefore, on the quite general notion of 'socialism' presented by Joseph Schumpeter in his work Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy. There are two aspects of socialism in Schumpeter's definition: the economic, and the cultural.

By socialist society we shall designate an institutional pattern in which the control over means of production and over production itself is vested with a central authority--or, as we may say, in which, as a matter of principle, the economic affairs of society belong to the public and not to the private sphere. Socialism has been called an intellectual Proteus. There are many ways of defining it--...and ours is not necessarily the best.

Our definition excludes guild socialism, syndicalism, and other types. This is because what may be termed Centralist Socialism seems to me to hold the field so clearly that it would be a waste of space to consider other forms... The term Centralist Socialism (however,) is only intended to exclude the existence of a plurality of autonomous territorial sectors that would go far toward reproducing the antagonisms of capitalist society. This exclusion of sectional interests may well be thought unrealistic. Nonetheless it is essential.

...our term is not intended to suggest centralism either in the sense that the central authority, which we shall alternatively call Central Board or Ministry of Production, is necessarily absolute or in the sense that all the initiative that pertains to the executive proceeds from it alone...

Schumpeter then states that "socialism aims at higher goals than full bellies... First and foremost, socialism means a new cultural world..." But what sort of cultural world? Schumpeter's answer, here, is fruitful and valid as far as it goes, but it does not, I believe, go quite far enough. "...we have to face what I shall refer to as the Cultural Indeterminateness of Socialism," he writes.

In fact, according to our definition as well as to most others, a society may be fully and truly socialist and yet be led by an absolute ruler or be organized in the most democratic of all possible ways; it may be aristocratic or proletarian; it may be a theocracy and hierarchic or atheist or indifferent as to religion; it may be much more strictly disciplined than men are in a modern army or completely lacking in discipline;...

It may be some of these things, or it may not be. I cannot conceive of an 'undisciplined' socialist society, for example. But that is not the point. Schumpeter is right to insist that there can be no

one, preconceived cultural form for a socialist society. What must be added, however, is that, no matter what material form of culture empirically emerges, the socialist idea is rooted in the concept of the equal worth of all people. There lies the source of its commitment to the redistribution of wealth, and to public ownership of the means of production. Only through these institutional innovations, socialism argues, can a condition be achieved where no human is treated as a commodity.

For the above citation, see Joseph Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, 1962; Torchbook edition), pp. 167-170

CHAPTER THREE

DERADICALIZATION, AND THE STALINIST DEGRADATION
OF THE CONCEPT OF STRUGGLE

There has been much debate, in recent years, over the nature of the relationship between Lenin's ideas and leadership, and Stalin's. A central issue is whether the kind of Soviet state, and the general brand of Communist politics which developed under the rule of Stalin, were an historically inevitable outgrowth of Leninist theory and policy. This question is unanswerable, although it can lead to interesting speculation about the nature of revolution, and the alternative directions it might take under differing sorts of political, economic, and cultural conditions.

One aspect of this debate, around which some agreement has emerged, is the question of the logical relationship between Leninist and Stalinist ideas. Many political scientists, in recent years, have begun to examine the extent to which it makes conceptual sense to view Leninism and Stalinism as identifiably distinct modes of political practice. The Bolshevism of 1917-1923 contained important 'seeds' of Stalinism, Stephen F. Cohen points out. He then adds, "The question is, however, not 'seeds'...but fundamental continuities and discontinuities."¹ In other words, the contrasts, not just the

connections, between these modes of Bolshevism must be recognized.

A number of scholars share Cohen's perspective that there is a qualitatively significant difference between Leninist and Stalinist practice, even though they might disagree on the meaning of those differences. "I hold that Stalinism must be recognized as an historically distinct and specific phenomenon which did not flow directly from Leninism," Robert C. Tucker writes, "although Leninism was a contributory factor." Tucker then states that Stalinism, "despite conservative, reactionary, or counter-revolutionary elements in its make-up, was a revolutionary phenomenon in essence..."² And even Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, in their history of the American Communist Party written in the mid-1950's, complained of a tendency among analysts to pass over important historical differences between Leninist and Stalinist politics. "... (A) number of writers have managed to construct a model of the Communist movement and ideology," they said,

without troubling to consider that Communism, like all other political tendencies, has been in constant process of change, and that from the party of Lenin to the party of Stalin there is a fundamental disjuncture marked by a violent counter-revolution. To say this is not to deny that certain features were held in common by the Communist movement of Lenin and the Communist movement of Stalin. But indiscriminately to mix quotations from Lenin's earlier writings with the recent pronouncements of Stalin is to obscure the complexity, the novelty, and the sheer deviousness of modern history.³

Clearly, there is no agreement, here, as to whether Stalinism is a 'revolutionary' or 'counter-revolutionary' phenomenon. But a consensus does exist among these analysts of Communism that, from Lenin to Stalin, a fundamental transformation in political structures and dynamics did take place. The problem--and here there is still much

argument--is to set apart and understand what the specific elements of that transformation were.

In line with the above approach, I will attempt to show that a conceptual distinction between Leninism and Stalinism is indeed meaningful. My own contention, however, is that a fundamental discontinuity appears between Leninism and Stalinism precisely at the point where each comes to deal with the theory and practice of ideological struggle, in the sense in which that concept was explained in the previous chapter.

Specifically, I will argue that there was a change in the quality and character of practice of Communist parties during the Stalinist era, and that this change was inextricably tied to two basic notions which set apart Stalinist from Leninist political thought. The first of these notions I will call 'structural determinism', the idea that transformation takes place mechanically, by the impact of external conditions alone. The second is that of Party infallibility, or the notion that, in relation to achieving the long-range goals of the movement, the highest authorities in the Bolshevik political structure can never make an incorrect political decision.

I want to stress two points. First, the presence of these determining assumptions in the practice of a Communist party does not imply that it has become deradicalized. During the Third Period, for example, one will find the most mechanical and dogmatic practice of which the American party was capable. Yet it continued, as it did not in the later thirties, to project a class-conflict vision of the world. In this sense, therefore, no matter how undermining and self-defeating its practice, it was not reformist. It was radical. But it was radical and Stalinist, two political forms which are capable of living together, in spite of the fact that

the latter, as I will argue throughout this dissertation, undermines the former. Stalinism does not negate radicalism.

The second point I wish to stress is that the notion of structural determinism directly conflicts with Gramsci's insight that ideological struggle must take place on the level of internal consciousness. Stalinism is concerned only with external methods of struggle. It assumes that the mere existence of organization, combined with the skillful exploitation of the 'right' material issue in the right way at the right time, is sufficient for overturning the engrained belief, held by a dominated class, in the legitimacy of the system under which it lives. Stalinism, to put the matter another way, believes social and political conviction will follow from the mechanics of organization, strategy, and dictate. It thus transmutes ideological struggle, into its opposite, indoctrination. That, in application, there is a fine line between these two forms of interaction, is an absolutely correct assertion. But I ask the reader to consider the proposition that there is, as well, a fundamental difference between them. I cannot formally prove the existence of that distinction; I can only, for now, attempt to elucidate what it means conceptually, and try to show the ways in which it differentiates Leninist from Stalinist theory and practice.

'Externality', I suggest, is the identifying characteristic of all Stalinist forms of action, belief, and struggle. Its behavioral paradigm, I contend, grants no significance to any notion of an independent, reasoning, and autonomous center of self-experience. Stalinist theory remains unaffected, therefore, by the problem of how this realm of the active intellect might be reached by those committed to a radical

understanding of the social order, and stimulated towards change of ideological grounding. The behavioral consequence of a theory which neglects the role of the inner political consciousness I will often refer to as 'inauthentic or mechanical' conviction. For the Stalinist organization does not really seek conviction from its members. It is satisfied by rote acceptance and imitative response.

The argument is not that 'Stalin imposed, Lenin struggled'. Lenin imposed, thereby creating conditions for the very mode of political intimidation he later attacked. Beginning with the seizure of power itself, in 1917, until he was almost totally incapacitated by a second stroke in 1923, Lenin sought continually to tighten the hold of the Bolsheviks over the Soviet state. As the revolution proceeded, the sphere of rights through which an opposition could legitimately criticize and differ with the decisions of Bolshevik leadership was consciously diminished, until it disappeared entirely.

History has shown the ease with which struggle atrophies and emerges as mechanism. But it does not follow that the distinction, therefore, is artificial. It does not necessarily follow that Leninist practice collapses, automatically, into a politics of manipulation. Most commentators on Lenin, even those most bitterly opposed to his ideas, acknowledge that ideological transformation was basic to his concept of revolutionary action. There is a general recognition that

Lenin defined both the exercise of power for its own sake, and the mere garnering of externally approved behaviors, as inadequate and self-defeating ends.

Leonard Schapiro is among those who believe that Lenin's claim of having to suppress democratic rights was no more than an empty rationale for keeping the Bolsheviks in power. Schapiro also believes that Lenin's practice led directly to the emergence of Stalinism. The latter "was a necessary consequence of Lenin's policy of eliminating criticism from the party," Schapiro writes. Yet Schapiro grants that Lenin's concept of the revolution differed from Stalin's, and that these larger philosophical differences set them at odds. "...Before a stroke in May, 1922 virtually eliminated Lenin from political life, there were already signs of discord between him and the new masters of Russia," Schapiro points out.

Lenin apparently retained his faith that, side by side with his system of rigid, centralized party dictatorship, the standards of the party could be raised, bureaucracy and careerism checked, and the efficiency and self-reliance of the proletariat developed...

Schapiro cites an incident in which Lenin's criticism of Stalin's concepts and methods came to the surface. Stalin, since 1919, had headed the Rabkrin, the office of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, "a vast, bureaucratic engine for control over the administration of economic life..."

A letter from Lenin to Stalin of 29 September 1921, at a time when Stalin was still head of this institution, perhaps illustrates more than anything, the contrast between the two men. 'The task of Rabkrin,' wrote Lenin, 'is not only, indeed not as much as at present, to "catch" and "expose" people... as to know how to improve them.'⁴

In Leninist theory, the seizure of power by itself is not enough to radicalize the belief system of the masses. To drop the struggle for socialist ideas, for ways to change, 'improve', people's behavior in relation to those ideas, is to drop the struggle for the revolution itself.

Barrington Moore's formulation, presented in his own study of the Russian Revolution, may be used to sum up this reading of Lenin's thought. "From the Bolshevik viewpoint," Moore writes,

force was not enough by itself to enable any group to hold power, once power had been achieved by revolutionary means. Lenin put the matter succinctly shortly before he was to assume power: 'the guillotine only intimidated, it only crushed active resistance. For us that is not enough.' In other words, the Bolsheviks regarded consensus as necessary for effective political action, while force was to be a mere auxiliary.⁵

Leninist politics sought behavioral change through the attainment of a new and radical social consensus, through an authentic shift of

ideological conviction. Imposition from above is viewed as insufficient expedient. For Stalinism, on the other hand, authenticity in the spheres of belief and action is irrelevant. Obedience and 'right' behavior are all that are required.

Let me suggest that Leninism tries to combine divergent modes of leadership: the revolutionary as insurrectionist, the revolutionary as educator to collectivist values and concepts. A case can be made that the roles are incompatible; in Leninist politics, however, they are seen as conflicting, but supplementary. They are understood as poles which sit at different ends of the spectrum of revolutionary action.

Lenin discussed the nature of these contrasting aspects of revolutionary practice in one of his last articles, which dealt with the New Economic Policy, and which he wrote in 1923. "... (W)e have to admit there has been a radical modification in our whole outlook on socialism," he stated in On Cooperation.

The radical modification is this: formerly we placed, and had to place, the main emphasis on the political struggle, on revolution, on winning political power, etc. Now the emphasis is changing and shifting to peaceful, organisational, 'cultural' work... If we... confine ourselves to internal economic relations, the emphasis in our work is certainly shifting to education.

Two main tasks confront us, which constitute the epoch-- to reorganise our machinery of state, which is utterly useless, and which we took over in its entirety from the preceding epoch... Our second task is educational work among the peasants...

The goal of this particular educational task as Lenin called it, was to organise the peasants in co-operative societies. "But the organisation of the entire peasantry in co-operative societies presupposes

a standard of culture among the peasants...that cannot in fact be achieved without a cultural revolution," Lenin continued. "... (I)n our country the political and social revolution preceded the cultural revolution, that very cultural revolution which nevertheless confronts us now."⁶ Revolution, in Leninist terms, is understood as having two generalized components of action. One is grounded in the use of force, the other, in modes of organization designed to foster cultural transformation, change in a society's values and ways of life.

It is fruitless to argue over which is the real Lenin: the insurrectionist, or the challenger of cultural consensus. Leninism includes both. I will deal, first, with its concepts of insurrection, and revolutionary coercion.

"If we are not anarchists, we must admit that the state, that is, coercion, is necessary for the transition from capitalism to socialism," Lenin wrote in 1918, during the period of War Communism. "...There is, therefore, absolutely no contradiction in principle between Soviet (that is, socialist) democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals."⁷ The use of the organized force of the state, as far as Lenin was concerned, was just the imposition of one set of social and economic interests over another set. For, by definition, political revolution rejects the legality of the existing order. In their use of force, therefore, all revolutions violate the controlling, historically validated, framework of constitutional rights. In the eyes of those adhering to the rights defined by the old order, revolutionary coercion is no more than illegal usurpation. For those attempting to impose a new system of rights, on the other hand, it is the justified employment of power by a newly emerging

state mechanism. The sorts of organized social coercion one recognizes as 'legitimate' will be, in every case of civil war or revolutionary conflict, a function of political allegiance and/or ideological leaning.

Lenin's notion of what comprised 'legitimate coercion' is illustrated by certain key acts and decisions of the Bolsheviks which mark their advance to a monopoly of power. When, in 1918, after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks did not get a majority elected to the Constituent Assembly, they simply marched in, and declared the Assembly dissolved. "... (T)he interests of this revolution" Lenin wrote, "stand higher than the formal rights of the Constituent Assembly."⁸ Lenin's attempt to justify, theoretically, his Party's particular violation of the legally constituted order, is weak and self-serving. For it assumes that no one but the Communists and their supporters knew what the 'real' as opposed to the 'formal' interests of the revolution were. Lenin always believed this, even as, in later years, he came to recognize the destructive direction in which its own leadership could take the Communist party.

In 1921, the Kronstadt sailors organized themselves and demanded, among other things, that the Bolsheviks permit re-elections by secret ballot to the Soviets, that freedom of speech be allowed for workers, peasants, Anarchists, and Left Socialists, and that there be freedom of meetings, trade-unions, and peasant associations. The Bolsheviks saw no alternative but to put the rebellion down by force.

Immediately upon the defeat of the Kronstadt sailors, the Tenth Party Congress, which was in session at the time, passed the Resolution on Party Unity. This resolution, insisted upon and drawn up by Lenin, dissolved any groups within the Party which had their own political platforms. "All class conscious workers must clearly realise," Lenin wrote,

that factionalism of any kind is harmful and impermissible, for no matter how members of an individual group may desire to safeguard Party unity, factionalism in practice inevitably leads to the weakening of harmonious work and to intensified and repeated attempts by the enemies of the governing Party, who have wormed their way into it, to widen the cleavage and to use it for counter-revolutionary purposes.

The resolution condemned factions, but it did not take away the right of criticism itself. "Criticism of the Party's shortcomings...is absolutely necessary..." Lenin insisted. There was a proviso, however. Such criticism "must under no circumstances be submitted for preliminary discussions to groups formed on the basis of 'platforms' etc., but must in all cases be submitted for discussion directly to all the members of the Party."

Lenin's concern to keep channels open for disagreement with leadership was insufficient. For all non-Bolshevik opposition had already been made illegal. The Tenth Party Congress, therefore, left the entire arena of Soviet politics devoid of any institutional means through which dissent from Bolshevik policy could be formally and organizationally expressed. "The Congress...orders the immediate dissolution of all groups without exception formed on the basis of one platform or another (such as the Workers' Opposition group, the Democratic Centralism group, etc.) Any refusal to observe the decision

meant "unconditional and instant expulsion from the Party." A secret clause authorized the Central Committee to police its own members in regard to this matter of organized opposition. A combined plenary of the Central Committee and the Control Commission could now, with a two-thirds majority, reduce any in their ranks to alternate status, or, if the breach of discipline were deemed severe enough, expel them from the Party.⁹

Argument continues today over whether Lenin's acts in these years were essential to protect the socialist revolution against its enemies. "Although the Bolsheviks' treatment of the other democratic parties was not beyond reproach," argues Roy Medvedev, the Soviet dissident historian,

it should be pointed out that the Communist Party's monopoly of political activity was a product of history; in a certain period it was an important condition for the realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat...

Only when the country was emerging from the Civil War, when difficulties were growing to the point that a split between the workers and the peasants was threatening, only then did Lenin denounce arguments among Bolsheviks and present a special resolution on Party Unity...¹⁰

Medvedev's argument would be more convincing if Lenin had not always integrated into his theoretical work the idea that socialist revolution could succeed only if controlled by a unified Communist Party. Thus, Lenin may have meant the Resolution on Party Unity to have been no more than a temporary measure. But, when set against his earlier pronouncements about the special leading role to be played by the Bolsheviks, and the danger of allowing political opposition during a time of revolutionary crisis, its extension into a general principle followed easily. When, later, Stalin began citing the secret clause

as precedent for his purge of opponents in the Central Committee, he was drawing upon not a particular and conditional stricture, but a much larger political context, one which had been developed and justified by Lenin himself.

In Russia, the Bolsheviks had enough support to appropriate to themselves, and to themselves alone, the right to decide what would constitute revolutionary policy. Organized dissent from their decisions was made illegal. Further, Lenin stated that only the Bolsheviks were capable of leading the proletariat, and used every means at his disposal to make sure that the Communist Party maintained control of the Soviets and their administrative agencies.

Around this issue of the unquestionable supremacy of Bolshevik leadership, the thought of Lenin and Stalin meet. One may argue, as does Medvedev, that Lenin, despite his theoretical pronouncements, saw this as only a temporary measure, forced by the Civil War, and by the staying power of capitalism in the West. But even if this reading stands, it does not lessen responsibility for what followed, or nullify the dangers, inherent in the notion of single-organization supremacy, to Lenin's own concept of revolutionary democracy.

One can drop the matter there, assuming that because both Lenin and Stalin believed in the natural right of the Bolsheviks to a monopoly of policy and power, their thought and political practice are identical in all major respects. But this is to neglect the other Lenin, the Lenin concerned with cultural transformation. According to Leninist theory, in order for socialist revolution to succeed, the vanguard, in the form of the Communist party,

would have to exercise and rely upon coercion. But this was not enough. For the vanguard also had to convince and educate--to win people's minds to an acceptance of the concepts and values of socialist ideology. And indeed, this was the vanguard's most crucial function. "... (T)he dictatorship of the proletariat is not only the use of force against the exploiters, and not even mainly the use of force," wrote Lenin in 1919.

The economic foundation of this use of revolutionary force, the guarantee of its effectiveness and success is the fact that the proletariat represents and creates a higher type of social organisation of labor compared with capitalism...

Under this notion, the transition from capitalism to socialism describes a transition in ways of thinking about the world itself. It entails a change in those values which define to whom a group sees itself related, and for whom, therefore, it will be willing to produce.

Communism begins when the rank and file workers display an enthusiastic concern that is undaunted by arduous toil to increase the productivity of labor, husband every pood of grain, coal, iron and other products, which do not accrue to the workers personally or to their 'close' kith and kin, but to their 'distant' kith and kin, i.e., to society as a whole, to tens and hundreds of people united in... one socialist state...¹¹

Coercion, in and of itself cannot bring about a cultural revolution.

It is important to grasp the depth of this concern in Lenin's post-revolutionary thought, and how extensive it is in his writings and propaganda activities of the time. In the midst of civil war, threats of social and economic collapse, forceful resistance to Bolshevik policy, and the consolidation of Western capitalism against local radical movements, and against the Soviet Union itself, Lenin

constantly focused attention and detail on the need for Communist organizers to confront and challenge ideological conviction. He turned to the specifics of these issues not in dry abstract articles written for the radical intelligentsia, but at Congresses and Councils of activists and party workers, people caught up in the immediacies of political practice. And it is here, in this matter of what Lenin called 'the character and methods of struggle' that the critical differences between Lenin and Stalin emerge.

Lenin addressed the question of ideological struggle in every aspect of his work, including Left-Wing Communism, which he subtitled "A Popular Essay in Marxist Strategy and Tactics." Here, for example, one finds Lenin's famous justification of subterfuge and dissemblance as means of coming into contact with workers.¹² The point, however, is that even here, in this especially direct, almost brutal discussion of strategy and tactics, Lenin insists that the basic component of an adequate radical activism is struggle around ideas. Whatever else, if radicals are to accomplish their goal of raising and transforming the political consciousness of working people, they must never hide their ideas from them.

You must tell them the bitter truth. You must call their bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices-- prejudices. But at the same time you must soberly observe the actual state of class consciousness and preparedness of the whole class (not only of its Communist vanguard)...¹³

One worked with the enemy where one had to. One deceived where one had to. But one spoke 'the bitter truth' to the workers, and never forgot that the priority, in and through everything else, was the enhancement of class consciousness.

That Lenin introduced his concerns with ideology, the struggle

around ideas, into Left-Wing Communism, hardly makes that the dominant theme of the work. Its focus is still the principles of maneuver and tactical compromise. Since the pamphlet was directed primarily at the international Communist parties, one might say that, during this period, Lenin most directly developed a theory of the relation between ideology and practice at home, in the speeches, public documents, and articles he wrote in response to the progress, or lack of progress, going on in Soviet society.

In the earliest years of Bolshevik rule, one of the immediate problems which forced Lenin to recognize that socialist ideas and culture were not taking root was the obvious, beginning deterioration of the Soviets into bureaucratic mechanisms. The Soviets, people's committees, were the political form at the heart of socialist democracy, a structure designed to involve the masses, for the first time in history, directly in the process of governance. "Since the end of the nineteenth century," Lenin wrote,

...revolutionary epochs have advanced to a higher type of democratic state...This is a state of the Paris Commune type...

This is the type of state which the Russian Revolution began to create in 1905 and 1917. A Republic of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', Peasants' and other Deputies, united in an All-Russia Constituent Assembly... is what is already being realized in our country...¹⁴

By their very nature and structure, Lenin maintained, Soviets, or governing councils made up of common people elected directly by their peers, would reflect socialist political ideals.

By March of 1919, two years later and approximately 18 months after these Soviets had become full fledged governing institutions, Lenin was faced with a slightly more disturbing picture. He had

detected in these new, higher forms of democratic rule, signs of the old bureaucratism, the old rule of state officials over the people, the old divorce of power from the control of the masses in whose name that power was exercised. "We are perfectly aware," Lenin told the Eighth Party Congress,

of the effect of Russia's cultural underdevelopment, of what it is doing to Soviet power...which, in principle has provided an immensely higher proletarian democracy...how this lack of culture is reducing the significance of Soviet power and reviving bureaucracy.¹⁵

Lenin here detaches political infallibility from the Soviet. It is in concept, in principle, that the Soviet apparatus can come to directly reflect the interests of the workers; in actual practice it is quite capable of slipping back towards the habits of bureaucracy. It provides the possibility of full democracy for those who labor, which bourgeois institutions could never do. But potential is one thing, realization of potential, another.

The Soviet apparatus is accessible to all the working people in word, but actually it is far from being accessible to them... And not because the laws prevent it from being so...

...Apart from the law there is still the level of culture, which you cannot subject to any law. The result of this low cultural level is that the Soviets, which by virtue of their programme are organs of government by the working people, are in fact organs of government for the working people by the advanced section of the proletariat...¹⁶

Lenin himself began to see the ways in which the vanguard, once in power, could separate itself from the common people and proletariat it claimed to represent and lead. No political structure, no social institution, no formal legal system could of itself, it followed, bring about proletarian democracy. In these matters, Lenin continued,

"we are confronted by a problem which cannot be solved except by prolonged education."¹⁷ The goal, for the educators and organizers of the Communist Party, is to elicit intellectual understanding and ideological acceptance, not just blind conformity. Lenin marks the distinction between these modes of behavioral response throughout his work. In Stalin's writings, however, there is not even a vocabulary with which to express the difference.

Lenin was soon facing the consequences of the fact that the working class as a whole in the new Republic of Soviets lacked an adequate culture and understanding of socialism. Their consciousness remained in a half-world of contradictory values and ways of life. "We do not hold the utopian view that the working masses are ready for a socialist society," he said to a Conference of Political Education Workers in November of 1920.

...Education workers, and the Communist Party as the vanguard in the struggle, should consider it their fundamental task to help enlighten and instruct the working masses, in order to cast off the old ways and habits, and the routine we have inherited from the old system...

...At this stage of the struggle we have to safeguard the development of the revolution and combat the bourgeoisie in the military sense and still more by means of our ideology through education, so that the habits, usages, and convictions acquired by the working class in the course of many decades of struggle for political liberty--the sum total of these usages, habits, and ideas--should serve as an instrument for the education of all working people.¹⁸

Internalization and adoption of socialist values by the masses was proving to be a serious problem for the revolution. Educational workers as a group, therefore, became one of the major axes around which post-revolutionary activity had to turn.

The need to win people to the ideas of socialism did not,

of course, mean abandoning the special leading role of the Bolshevik Party in all this work. Quite the reverse. But, unlike Stalin, and the difference is essential, Lenin was prepared to recognize that the Party as an institution was not above reproach--that it was subject to imperfection, that it did not always have answers, and that its decisions did not necessarily, in every case, reflect the best interests of the working class. But the Party provided a direction, and, Lenin believed that, under the circumstances, there were no alternative sources for the kind of unified, ideologically pointed leadership which Bolshevik theory saw as basic in the transition to socialism. "... (T)here can only be a single conclusion," he told the educators,

one that should be the cornerstone of all arguments and theories about the Chief Committee for Political Education: the primacy of the Communist Party's policy must be frankly recognized in the work of that body. We know of no other form of guidance; and no other has been evolved by any country. Parties may represent the interests of their class in one degree or another; they may undergo changes or modifications, but we do not yet know of any better form...¹⁹

Lenin stood by the principle of single party supremacy. But he did not promulgate the idea that the Communist Party was infallible. Vanguard organizations, he acknowledged, 'may represent the interests of this class in one degree or another...' ²⁰

Lenin became convinced that the deterioration of democratic into bureaucratic centralism was determined, above all else, by the quality of the vanguard. The responsibility of Communist leadership was to enable people to see the structural connections between socialist ideas, and the qualitative changes which took place in the character of their daily lives. If the new ideology were to take social root,

people would have to come to it rationally, out of a recognition of the ways in which the alternative value system deepened the meaning of their experience. This meant that Communists had to engage people's minds, and use their own with clarity. "In our struggle," Lenin told the Party Congress in 1922, "we must remember that Communists must be able to reason.

They may be perfectly familiar with the revolutionary struggle and with the state of the revolutionary movement all over the world; but if we are to extricate ourselves from desperate poverty and want, we need culture, integrity, and an ability to reason.²¹

But a leadership based on 'the ability to reason' was still subject to imperfection; it could not be programmed to produce absolutely correct decisions. The value of a party organization and party leaders 'worthy of the name,' Lenin wrote in Left-Wing Communism,

lies precisely in the fact that they help by means of the prolonged, persistent, varied and all-round efforts of all thinking representatives of the given class, in the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, the necessary experience and--apart from knowledge and experience--the necessary political instinct for the speedy and correct solution of intricate political problems.²²

Effective radical leadership requires a special understanding of the relation between experience and consciousness. It is based upon both objective knowledge of a broad range of historical principles, and subjective factors of skill, insight, intuition, and instinct. As conceived by Lenin, the vanguard leader does have a more advanced, and more highly developed comprehension of the direction of society, than is available to other political actors. He or she is, therefore, organizer, teacher, behavioral model. And the skills which these leaders come to possess, can themselves be taught and transferred to others.

In his very last public paper, Lenin came back to the issues of culture and vanguard consciousness, once again warning the Bolshevik leadership to slow down, and let go of a growing arrogance.

Our state apparatus is so deplorable that we must first think very carefully how to combat its defects, bearing in mind that these defects are rooted in the past...We might say that the good in our social system has not been properly studied, understood, and taken to heart...

...We must show sound scepticism for too rapid progress, for boastfulness... The most harmful thing would be to rely on the assumption that we know at least something, or that we have (the)...elements necessary for the building of a...state apparatus...really worthy to be called socialist, Soviet, etc...

No, we are ridiculously deficient of such an apparatus... we must remember that we should not stint time on building it... We must follow the rule: Better fewer, but better...²³

Unless the makers of revolution accepted that values rooted in centuries of acquired habit and tradition exercised a hold on everyone in the new system, and that no one, not even leadership, was free of the past, then the old ways, Lenin believed, would inevitably re-assert themselves.

Lenin was right to have been concerned. For under the impact of conflicting ideological currents and specific historical conditions, whatever else might have happened, his original notion of the force of ideology in changing and redirecting behavior itself became redirected. The strain of his thought dealing with the enhancement of consciousness, and the development of socialist culture, became downgraded, and neglected by the new leadership. Under patterns of action and political relationship explicitly fostered by Stalin, bureaucracy, automatism, and a simplistic economic determinism began to shape the life of the Communist movement.

In the next section, I will discuss Stalinist ideology, and the kinds of assumptions it makes about revolutionary practice which differentiate it from Leninist thought. Before I move on, however, I want to re-emphasize the point made earlier: there are two Lenins, and an adequate appreciation of Communist behavior requires an understanding of the both of them. There is that aspect of Leninist theory which is concerned with ideology and the transformation of social belief. It stated, writes Robert C. Tucker, 'that the fundamental obstacle to socialism was the body of habit left over from the past, and that the revolutionizing of habit--in other words, of culture--was an educational task rather than one to be resolved by coercive means.'²⁴ I have concentrated on this element in Lenin's thought for two reasons. First it elucidates the notion of ideological struggle, which is an essential component of radicalism itself, as defined by the paradigm proposed in the previous chapter. And secondly, it calls attention to the theoretical point at which Lenin and Stalin most sharply diverge.

But there is a second Lenin as well, "the very influential revolutionary Lenin of the War Communism period," writes Tucker. This was the Lenin prepared to use revolutionary terror to impose the rule of the Bolsheviks at whatever cost. Stalin

was drawing upon the Leninism that had stood during 1918-21 for forcible food requisitioning from the peasant,...for stirring up of class war in the villages by means of the committees of the poor,...for the belief (to cite Lenin) that the proletarian government should mean 'iron rule' and not 'jellyfish' proletarian government...

I cannot agree with Tucker's later notion that war communism may be identified as 'Stalinist Leninism'; and Tucker himself grants that there were fundamental differences between the revolutionary terror of

the Civil War, and the forced collectivization and purges of the late nineteen-twenties and thirties. But that Stalin could look to this period as precedent for his own brand of rule is undeniable. As Tucker states, the authenticity of Stalin's claim to be furthering Leninist policies, "is not seriously diminished by the important fact that what Leninism stood for in Lenin's own mind, as a conception of how to build socialism in Russia, underwent great modification in 1921-23."²⁵

- 2 -

Among Stalin's major contributions to revolutionary theory and practice I would include the following. First, he eliminated Lenin's argument that conflict around ideas had an independent and necessary role to play in the development of class consciousness, a role distinct from the ones played by organization, strategy, and tactics. Secondly, he overwhelmed the notion that good strategy and tactics came from a skilled and insightful leadership, with the idea that it came from an all-knowing and infallible one. He thus placed Party decision-making outside the sublunary realm of human imperfection, freeing it from the reach of honest disagreement and criticism. In a word, Stalin gutted the concept of ideological struggle of its basic components. It is important to note, as well, that he did this through use of the same terms and language by which the concept had originally been built up.

If it were only the behavior of Stalin at issue here, or of a clique surrounding him, or even of large sectors of the Russian Bolshevik Party, one could perhaps dismiss their orientation as

product of a particular personality or cultural type, or related to particular historical conditions and national backgrounds. But Stalinism as a pattern of action came to define a world movement. It came to include within its ranks a tremendous range of human character and culture. It could not have maintained the universal shape it did, I suggest, without the support of a theoretical and philosophical skeletal structure, an ideological frame, to which there were welded a common set of norms, assumptions, and institutions. The question is whether, beneath the self-righteousness, the cant, the misuse of language, the vagaries of action defined as expressions of absolute principle, a consistent intellectual content can be uncovered.

The basic theoretical constructs of Stalinism become visible only after the notion of ideological struggle has been analyzed, as I have tried to do in this, and the previous chapter. The Stalinist pattern of behavior flows, at bottom, from the principle that ideological struggle is irrelevant to concrete political activity. In contrast, as many of Lenin's articles and speeches from the years of War Communism indicate, concern for change in inner social belief was always part of his notion of revolutionary practice. But where administrative decree, pronounced strategic line, or sudden dictate of the Central Committee lead, a Stalinist is convinced, consciousness of the masses, sooner or later, is sure to follow. As Stalin wrote: "... (A)fter the correct political line has been laid down, organization work decides everything, including the fate of the political line itself..."²⁶ This is the degradation of the concept of struggle.

The full exegis of Stalinist ideology lies outside the scope of this study. No ideology can be characterized by a single principle, and the total network of Stalin's theory of politics is of a much greater complexity than has so far been suggested. But first there has to be recognition that such a consistent theory does, indeed, mark Stalin's thought, and that Stalinism is not just a matter of 'excess', or 'extraordinary extremism', as Stephen F. Cohen proposes, for example.²⁷ A substantive theory of political organization and behavior underlies Stalinist practice, and it was structurally projected through the character of an entire social movement.

1. In Stalinist theory, it is organization and strategy and line and tactics which are determining for the transformation of consciousness. Succinctly put, structure is all. The Stalinist is an unswerving economic determinist. Worsening material conditions automatically turn people against capitalism, in the Stalinist world; collective modes of production and distribution automatically bring about socialist consciousness; the setting up of formally democratic decision-making mechanisms, like the Soviets, automatically leads to a genuine involvement of people in the making of policy.

It is typical of the Stalinist dialectic that the work in which this strict economic determinism, which represents a precise break with Lenin, is given its first direct, clear formulation in a pamphlet entitled Foundations of Leninism. Lenin, in the years after the revolution, had again and again emphasized how disturbed he was by the evident lack of a developing socialist culture among the Communist cadres. Placing untrained workers, and even seasoned revolutionaries, into Bolshevik offices and government agencies more

often bureaucratized the new administrators, it seemed to him, than radicalized state policy. This was one of the major reasons Lenin put political education, and the reasoned study of basics, so high on the activist agenda.

In Section II of the Foundations, entitled 'Method', Stalin writes as if Lenin had never touched upon this problem. It is a dogma of the Second International, Stalin informs his readers, "that the proletariat cannot retain power if it lacks an adequate number of trained cultural and administrative workers capable of organizing the administration of the country; these cadres must first be trained under capitalist conditions, and only then can power be taken."

Stalin has mis-stated and oversimplified the position of the Mensheviks on this question. He now calls on the authority of Lenin for support.

Let us assume that this is so, replies Lenin; but why not turn it this way: first take power, create favorable conditions for the development of the proletariat, and then proceed with seven-league strides to raise the cultural level of the laboring masses and train numerous cadres of leaders and administrators from among the workers? Has not Russian experience shown that the cadres of leaders recruited from the ranks of the workers develop a hundred times more rapidly and effectually than under the rule of capital?²⁸

But Lenin, in his postrevolutionary writings, never took the position that the seizure of power alone was enough to change the habits of centuries. He saw that placing workers in political structures designed in terms of socialist values did not allow for consciousness to surge forward as, say, do suddenly unimpeded waters, 'a hundred times more rapidly and effectually...' The institutions of revolutionary society changed the conditions under which ideological struggle could proceed,

Lenin argued; they did not of themselves transform consciousness. Tremendous and open struggle around ideas and values, active involvement in challenging the general level of the existing awareness of working people, all undertaken by a Communist vanguard, were still the essence of revolutionary practice.

It is the pressure brought to bear on people's lives by external material and political circumstance which Stalinism defines as the major historical mode through which radical consciousness comes into being. The thorough Stalinist, therefore, is concerned exclusively with the manipulation, to whatever extent possible, of such external circumstance; the only things required to orchestrate ideas and feelings in a revolutionary direction, he or she assumes, are the properly structured organization, the properly planned strategic slogan, the properly carried out sequence of programatic activity. Stalinism therefore makes simple and unproblematic what Lenin made the central dilemma of post-revolutionary politics: the hold of a bureaucratic and inegalitarian value system on the consciousness of previously exploited classes.

On the basis of a brief discussion of one of Stalin's key works, The Foundations of Leninism, I have tried to identify, as a basic component of Stalinist ideology, a principle which I labeled 'structural determinism'. The next section will attempt a somewhat fuller analysis of certain Stalinist texts, in order to demonstrate the ways in which this principle underlies the logic of two basic programs of the early Stalin era: Third Period militancy, and the doctrine of social fascism. Now I turn to a second element fundamental to Stalinist thought, the notion of Party infallibility.

2. Stalin built to the idea of Party infallibility by distending Lenin's concept of vanguard leadership. Lenin, the reader will recall, believed that good leadership followed from a scientific understanding of society, but he never suggested that leadership itself could either be all-knowing or scientifically exact. "... (A)nyone who set out to invent a recipe for the workers that would provide ready-made solutions for all cases in life," he wrote in Left-Wing Communism, "... would simply be a charlatan."²⁹ Lenin also believed, of course, that the most skilled at deriving correct strategies for change would, indeed, be Bolsheviks. But nevertheless, Lenin recognized, even in his most strategically oriented works, that the question of the competence and quality of leadership confronted radical politics with some of its most profound dilemmas. Under Stalin's formulation, however, this entire dimension of concern simply drops out of sight. "Basing itself on the data of theory, the program of Marxism determines the aims of the proletarian movement, which are scientifically formulated in the clauses of the program."³⁰ It is as if program follows from theory with the certainty of a demonstration in chemistry or physics.

The whole element of consciousness, with which Lenin was so concerned, is not even an issue for Stalinist ideology. Correct principles "ensure correct strategic leadership," Stalin writes.³¹ The goal of tactical leadership "is to single out from all the tasks confronting the Party the particular, immediate task... the accomplishment of which ensures the successful fulfillment of the other immediate tasks."³² A truly Marxist strategy ensures political success, according to Stalin, because it is scientifically grounded. "The

strategy and tactics of Leninism constitute the science of leadership in the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat."³³

Stalinism simply ignores the fact that the hallmark of scientific practise is not absolute certainty, but openness to testing and change in the face of new data. What follows from Stalin's peculiar mis-reading of the scientific enterprise is the notion of the infallibility of the Party and all its works. There is no acknowledgment of human beings as imperfect products of an imperfect world, and thus subject to error and limitation. The Party, Stalin writes, is 'the highest form of class organization of the proletariat.'

The Party possesses all the necessary qualifications for this because, in the first place, it is the rallying center of the finest elements in the working class, who have direct connections with the non-Party organizations of the proletariat, and frequently lead them; because, secondly, the Party, as the rallying center of the finest members of the working class, is the best school for training leaders of the working class, capable of directing every form of organization of their own class; because, thirdly, the Party, as the best school for training leaders of the working class, is, by reason of its experience and prestige, the only organization capable of centralizing the leadership of the struggle of the proletariat...³⁴

The Party, which stands at the head of all organizations concerned with bringing working people together as a class, is without weakness or flaw.

Leninist and Stalinist theories of political activism stand in opposition to one another around the question of how shift in ideological perspective occurs in the awareness of those involved in social struggle. The concepts of structural determinism and party infallibility make the process a mechanical one, and strip it of vitality. For, in combination, these principles turn radical advocacy from a process of intellectual stimulation and transformation

of consciousness, into one of indoctrination, and the garnering of rote programmatic responses to whatever happens in the political environment.

Since political practice, under these assumptions, reduces to the manipulation of organizational stimuli, the larger ideas of radicalism may, or may not, be consciously advanced as part of action, depending upon whether leadership thinks it strategically advisable to do so. Ideological struggle is taken not as an essential and fundamental element in the practice of radical politics, but as a strategic and dependent one. Stalinism, therefore, despite the fact that it may project a class-conflict theory at any given point in its history, easily allows for the introduction of a deradicalized politics.

In the next section, I will take a look at some of the mechanisms and events through which these Stalinist assumptions about the nature of socialist practice came to control the Comintern.

- 3 -

It is important to grasp the mechanisms and events through which Stalinist assumptions about the nature of socialist practice came to dominate the international communist movement. Historically, one of the most important factors precipitating this turn was the failure of revolutionary groups to win power in the industrialized West. But this only set the conditions for Stalinist hegemony in the International; it does not explain the workings through which a particular framework and set of ideas came to mold organizational behavior and direction.

In this section, I want to focus on two events which, I suggest, were of especial importance in communicating Stalinist patterns of thought and action throughout the International. The first

event is the development of the principle of 'socialism in one country', which came to play a major role in the ideological and programmatic life of Communist parties everywhere. And the second is the announcement of the Third Period line, made at the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928, and followed, shortly thereafter, by the doctrine of 'social-fascism'. Closely related to the Third Period Theses, and following the same logic, the concept of social-fascism was formally introduced to the members of the Comintern at the Executive Committee's Tenth Plenary Session in early 1929.

'Socialism in one country' firmly established the concept of party infallibility as an essential attribute of Bolshevik practice, for it subjugated the policies of all national Communist movements to the interests of the Soviet party. And both the formal Resolution of the Sixth Comintern Congress, "The International Situation and the Tasks of the Comintern," and the very notion of social-fascism, were grounded, I hope to show, in the theoretical framework which defined structural and economic determinism.

There was a third occurrence which helped disseminate Stalinist political ideas throughout the world communist movement, one of particular importance for the history of the American Communist party. This was the Comintern's special commission on the American party, held in Moscow in May of 1929. The commission had been called together to deal with an especially bitter factional fight that had broken out among the American Communists.

I will look at Stalin's method of resolving the American factional split in the next chapter. In the remainder of this one, I want first briefly to trace the emergence of the Stalinist concept

of socialism in one country. Then I want to discuss, and demonstrate, the strict determinist theory behind the Theses of the Sixth Congress, and behind the concept of social-fascism. In both cases I will be attempting to focus upon, and illustrate, key characteristics of Stalinist ideology.

By 1924 it had become clear that the overthrow of capitalism in the advanced liberal democracies, which Marx had predicted, and Lenin had counted upon, was hardly imminent. Stalin, as new head of the Party which had made the first socialist revolution, was able, therefore, to introduce a change into Marxist theory, and be heard on the international level. History had already demonstrated, the argument ran, that a nationally based proletariat, if it were well organized and the right conditions prevailed, could overthrow its own bourgeoisie without the occurrence of world revolution. Stalin suggested, writes Helmut Gruber, "--and here lies the novelty of his theory--that Russia by itself was capable of carrying through the organization of socialist production."³⁵ What this meant, and what those who accepted affiliation with the Third International after 1924 believed, was that protection of needs of the first socialist state was an imperative for protection of the international revolution as a whole.

Fernando Claudin, in his history of international communism, contends that, on one level, the policy of socialism in one country was a legitimate and consistent response to the existing world situation. For, while Marx and Engels had predicted that the Western proletariat would have to play the leading role in the overthrow of capitalism, their theory did not rule out the possibility that

under certain historical conditions, such as those stemming from the impact of war, a general revolutionary conflagration could be set off from a less developed nation like Russia. As Marx had written to Adolph Sorge in 1877:

Russia...has long been standing on the threshold of an upheaval; all the elements of it are prepared. The gallant Turks have hastened the explosion by years with the thrashing they have inflicted... The upheaval will begin ...with some playing at constitutionalism, and then there will be a fine row... This time the revolution begins in the East, hitherto the unbroken bulwark and reserve army of counter-revolution.

Marx and Engels refer a number of times in their correspondence to such a development.³⁶

In this sense, Lenin's insistence on pushing the February revolution of 1917, essentially liberal-democratic in nature, over into a radical socialist one, was not a contradiction of basic Marxist ideas. It was perfectly consistent with a distinction made and sharpened by Marx and Engels in their theory of revolution. This is the distinction, Claudin explains,

...two concepts which are commonly formulated in the same terms: the concept of the socialist revolution as social revolution, as the socialist transformation of economic and social structures and of political and cultural superstructures; and the concept of the socialist revolution as a political revolution, marked with the distinctive feature of the capture of power by the working class... In order to distinguish between the two contents of the concept 'revolution', Lenin brought in the expressions 'revolution in the broad sense' and 'revolution in the narrow sense'.³⁷

Lenin thought of the Bolshevik seizure of power as a revolution in the narrow sense, as a prelude and catalyst to the eruption of a wide-spread and major social revolution across Europe. He did not believe, in 1917, that the Russian radicals would ever have to con-

template completing the social revolution by themselves.

At the time of the Fifth Comintern Congress, held in 1924, not long after Lenin's death, no great insight was required to recognize that, if the Russian revolution were not to fall prey to reconquest, the Bolsheviks had to do more than just try to spark revolution in the West. A concrete political response to events had to be forth-coming. It was in this context that Stalin developed the programmatic goal of socialism in one country.

Leninist theory does not assess either the seizure of power by a revolutionary group in Russia in 1917, or the continued staying power of the revolution in the face of an entrenched capitalism, as logically necessitating an over-all rejection of basic Marxist assumptions. It views these happenings simply as new, unanticipated data brought about by particular historical actions, and attempts to incorporate them into the larger theoretical framework. The policies and programs derived in response to these events, therefore, must be understood as variable, specific, and limited empirical generalizations, stemming from immediate and variable circumstance.

Claudin's thesis is that Stalin projected the policy of socialism in one country as a major theoretical innovation, rather than relegating it to the lower conceptual status of short-range, empirical generalization, where it belonged. This made possible the deductive inference that a socialist revolution could not come to completion in the broad sense in one particular national sector, despite a continuing vitality to international capitalism. Such a schematization turns the first national political revolution into something which stands above and apart from political and social

revolution in the rest of the world. It is understood as autonomous, independent, and potentially complete unto itself.

By giving primary theoretical significance to the policy of socialism in one country, Stalinism made conceptual room for distorting a strategy designed to shore up the revolutionary seizure of power within one regime into a justification and tool for preventing that seizure anywhere else. In the words of Trotsky, which appeared long before the consequences of this policy could be empirically known, "the task of the parties in the Comintern assumes an auxiliary character"; their mission becomes "to protect the USSR from intervention, and not to fight for the conquest of power. It is, of course," he added, "not a question of subjective intentions but of the objective logic of political thought."³⁸ Gradually, a framework of unexamined subordination to authority came to settle over the consciousness of communist militants who, in other areas, continued to demonstrate a fierce autonomy and ready commitment to challenge the existing arrangements of their world.

After the Fifth Congress, it became a condition of membership in the Third International that one accept Stalin's reading of the principle of socialism in one country. To be in a Communist party, therefore, was to accept that the fate of the world revolution was indissolubly tied to defense of the Soviet system above all else. It followed that the determinations of the Executive Committee of the Comintern should conform to the patterns laid out for it by those actors most intimately connected to this first socialist revolution, those who had demonstrated their knowledge and experience in fostering correct revolutionary strategy. Stalin and his sup-

porters then proceeded, naturally enough, to use their position to re-enforce and disseminate their own particular concepts of social struggle and revolutionary practice. That they used the Comintern to benefit themselves in internal power struggles within the Russian party is unquestionable, but what I am arguing is that there was much more to it than this. From the headquarters of the world revolution they broadcast decisions, programs, and behavioral principles which were rooted in, and defined by, the notions of structural determinism and party infallibility. To break with these directions and conceptualizations of practice, was to break with the Soviet revolution itself.

If the principle of 'socialism in one country' finally and irreversibly swept all Communist militants into the web of Party infallibility, the Sixth World Congress of 1928, and the Tenth Plenary Session of some months later, unleashed Stalin's particular brand of economic and tactical determinism on the world Communist movement. For both were based on the assumption that the conditions of capitalism were worsening and that therefore, as a matter of course, the revolutionary consciousness of the international proletariat was expanding and deepening. The Sixth Congress brought us the Third Period; the Tenth Plenary session, the idea of social-fascism. In the final section of this chapter, I will focus upon the logical and empirical analyses which the Comintern offered as justifications for both these programmatic doctrines.

The Theses put forth by the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928

divided the history which had passed since the October Revolution into three periods. The first period started with the actual seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, and extended to sometime in 1923, when Communist uprisings in Bulgaria and Germany were defeated. The defeat of the German proletariat "marked the starting point of the second period, a period of gradual and partial stabilization of the capitalist system." In the years from 1924 to 1927, the Theses assert, the capitalist world economy was able to restore itself, and politically organize, on both domestic and international levels, against the spread of socialism. Still, even in these years, the Comintern document insists, the work of building socialism in the USSR went on, accompanied by the "growth of political influence of communist parties over broad masses of the proletariat."

It is during 1927, the Comintern states, that the Third Period emerges, a period in which the productivity of monopoly capitalism finally begins to over-reach itself.

For the capitalist system, this is the period of rapid development of technique, and accelerated growth of cartels and trusts... At the same time, it is a period of intense development of the contradictions of world capitalism...³⁹

The conclusion which the Comintern drew from this analysis was that the time had come for the world communist movement to move towards the left in its strategy, tactics, programs and slogans. Propaganda and educational literature were to take on an explicit, revolutionary, and anti-capitalist edge. They were to stress the inevitability of class conflict, and the fundamental opposition of the proletariat to all other class formations. Alliances with liberal and social-democratic organizations were to be ended. 'Class against class'

became the rallying cry of the international proletariat.

Many historians have traced the origin of the Third Period line, not to any scientifically determined worsening of the crisis of capitalism, but to a worsening crisis of Russian domestic political intrigue. And it is true that the development of the Third Period line, a sharp and uncompromising turn to the left, cannot be understood apart from Stalinist power struggles.⁴⁰ Still, what these analyses of the origins of the Third Period overlook, is that, within the context of the twenties, the radical dissection of capitalism offered by the Sixth Congress could be accepted as reasonable and coherent on its own theoretical and empirical terms.

The Theses charge, first of all, that 'radical structural changes were taking place in the world economic system. It is difficult to disagree, even today, that capitalism was undergoing a basic structural change in those years, and that the effects were being felt in the late twenties. As a result of technological advance, industry was becoming capital, rather than labor, intensive, and moving from competitive to, at best, oligopolistic forms of production. These shifts meant at least a short term drop in the use of productive capacity, as huge corporations, swallowing up smaller corporations, abandoned those sites and machinery which they found unprofitable to maintain, consolidated their technical plant, and increased worker output through automation. This in turn meant, sooner or later, higher rates of unemployment. "The successes achieved in technique and organization," the Theses argue,

have helped to create chronic mass unemployment in the leading industrial countries. The unemployed army of today far exceeds in number the industrial reserve army of pre-war times, and is not absorbed entirely, even in

periods of boom. In the United States, for example, where the greatest successes have been achieved by technique, we have, simultaneously with a powerful increase in production, a diminution in the amount of labor power employed by capital in industry.⁴¹

The point to focus upon in assessing the theoretical content of the Sixth Congress Theses is not whether these were boom years for capitalism. They were. But the Comintern's assertion was that, underlying this boom was a layer of unemployment that would not go away, could only be expected to get worse, and would soon lead to a crisis of the system. One did not have to accept this argument. But neither was it inconsistent with certain trends which were becoming visible in the major capitalist economies.

The general analysis of world conditions on which the Third Period line was based was logically argued, empirically grounded, and surprisingly free of polemic. The serious intellectual problems afflicting the Theses do not arise here, in its theoretical and analytic sections. The serious problems arise later, in those sections discussing the strategy, tactics, and general political practice upon which the Comintern--in consequence of its descriptive and explanatory analysis--now came to insist. For the directives of the Sixth Comintern Congress, in relation to program, strategy, and tactics, presuppose an economic determinism nowhere mentioned or discussed in Comintern literature.

The Theses operate out of the assumption that, because the contradictions of capitalism could be said to be intensifying, it experientially followed that the proletariat was moving politically to the Left, accepting the platform of the Third International, and joining the various communist parties. "Simultaneous" with "the

general acuteness of class antagonisms" and the resultant attempts of bourgeois and social democratic movements to "drive communists underground," the Theses state,

...the resistance of the working class, which has already recovered from the severe defeats of the preceding period, is growing and assuming extremely diverse forms...

The general process of the 'working class swing to the Left' in European countries continues further;... There is a quickening in the process of more militant elements of the working class abandoning the social-democrats and coming over to the communist camp...

Thus, notwithstanding the counter-measures of the bourgeoisie and social-democrats..., the contradictions of capitalism, and the growing acuteness of the class struggle, cause an ideological differentiation, and growth of the revolutionary forces in the working class movement, to strengthening of the position of Communism in that movement...⁴²

There has been a strange, illegitimate, but tremendously subtle shift in the Theses' logic of discourse. It is one thing to argue that class conflicts and economic tensions are brewing beneath the surface of an apparently expansive phase of capitalism. It is another to move, without pause, from a theoretical exposition of the nature and sources of these tensions, to the practical conclusion that the proletariat, in consequence, is suddenly becoming more radical in politics and organization.

The rather bald assertion of a 'working class swing to the Left', is made on only the flimsiest of evidence. The Theses talk of 'a strike wave in a number of countries', 'an uprising of the Viennese proletariat', 'the demonstrations against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti', 'the movement in favor of the USSR', 'etc'. But even if the boom of the twenties was marked by a high level of economic and political unrest, this does not imply 'radicalization

of the masses'; one did not have to want socialism, let alone communism, to participate in a strike, walk a picket line to save the lives of Sacco and Vanzetti, or actively favor recognition of the Soviet Union.

There is an embarrassing question posed by a close reading of the Theses. Why was an 'ideological differentiation' or a 'strengthening of communism' caused by slowly heightening economic and political tensions? No answer is provided by the Comintern document. Yet, no experience in the history of radicalism validated the contention that either economic crisis, or militant organization, of themselves, revolutionized laboring people, and brought them forward to a developed class consciousness. Indeed, though no one was probably bothering to read his later works, Lenin had spent the last years of his life amassing evidence which demonstrated the fallaciousness of such a concept. Under Stalin's leadership, however, the assumption that there is a causative relation between objective, structural conditions, and a transformation of political consciousness, became inextricably, but almost invisibly, woven in the the very design of the Comintern's ideology and practice.

The Tenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern was convened approximately one year after the Sixth Congress, and further entrenched the determinist implications of Stalinist ideology in the world movement. The international proletariat, the Plenum found, continued to suffer 'growing miseries', but to undergo, simultaneously, an extension of its radical consciousness.

The Plenum of the ECCI states that the present formation of governments by the most important parties of the 2nd International, in circumstances of the growing miseries of the working class, creates conditions for the deepest crisis of

social democracy within the proletarian masses. This crisis finds its expression in the quickening of the process of radicalization in the broad working masses. It inevitably leads social democracy to a loss of influence over broad working masses, and thereby creates favorable conditions for the communist parties to conquer the majority of the working class.⁴³

Indeed, the Tenth Plenum proved prophetic, if only in part. For the history of the next five years demonstrated that severe economic collapse, occurring while a social-democratic party was in power, did precede a social-democratic government's loss of influence over 'broad working masses'. Unfortunately, at least in the case of Germany, the defection of these masses was to fascism, not communism.

The Tenth Plenum is important because it enabled the Stalinists to carry their economic determinism to its furthest logical point. Since the growing miseries of the working class automatically and inevitably brought the proletariat leftward, the Comintern instructed its sections that they were to complete the job. As the workers drifted from the orbit of the bourgeoisie, the Communist parties were to get them to go all the way, and to break with the Bolsheviks' closest political rivals, the left-wing social democrats. The ECCI, that is, directed its member organizations to turn their strongest attacks, not just against social democrats, but particularly against left-wing social democrats. The Tenth Plenum formally established the notion of social-fascism, and made it an essential part of the Comintern program.

The Plenum of the ECCI makes it the duty of all sections of the Comintern to strengthen their struggle against international social democracy as the most important buttress of capitalism.

The Plenum of the ECCI proposes that particular attention be given to the struggle against the 'left' wing of social democracy, which halts the process of disintegration of social democracy by spreading illusions to the effect that

this wing is in opposition to the policy of the leading social democratic bodies, whereas, in reality, it supports in all possible ways the policy of social fascism.⁴⁴

One need have no fear, according to the Plenum, in attacking and weakening those groups which, on the face of things, would seem to be one's staunchest allies in an anti-fascist struggle. After all, according to the logic of economic determinism, the closer fascism came to taking power, the greater the resistance the working classes would put up, and the more quickly would they move to support and identify with the Parties of the Third International. History would vindicate any slight distortions made in the interest of hurrying this process along, and eliminating left social-democracy.

Irving Howe and Louis Coser can recognize no logic at all behind the doctrine of social-fascism. "Those who could accept this doctrine," they write,

and see in it proof of the wisdom and virtue of the Comintern were the ones who would be ready to accept everything, every twist and turn of Stalinist policy... The totalitarian party requires from its followers an acquiescence in some vast initial absurdity, which is to serve both as the link of faith and as proof of a readiness to surrender individual judgement.⁴⁵

But the idea of social fascism is not an 'initial absurdity'. It follows as a logical strategic consequence of the much more basic set of premises that define economic determinism, and that were used to justify the Third Period line. As long as the communists were grounding their activity and program in these premises, the doctrine of social-fascism reflected a continuum of ideas. Under conditions of worsening economic crisis, and expanding revolutionary consciousness, one did everything one could to undermine one's nearest political opposition.

It was the stubborn refusal to grant fallibility to its own point of view that permitted Stalinism to break loose from the moorings of the very rationality it claimed as its source. As long as a proposition was consistent with programatic ends, it was assumed to reflect truth at some level. Thus, many Stalinists felt free to push their attacks on socialists to absurd and outrageous lengths. "Building a Fascist Terror Machine Against the Working Class--Norman Thomas for Violence Against the Workers Under the Screen of Police Efficiency," an October, 1929 headline of the Daily Worker informed its readers. Of what did this fascist advocacy consist?

The Socialist Party and the candidacy of Norman Thomas are serving the capitalist class with special competence in helping to carry through the fascization of the state power... The Socialist Party in the last election campaign in the name of efficiency of government...favored the re-organization of state government, and called for a more efficient police force...

Surely, even by the intellectual standards of Stalinism, one could grant objective differences to exist between the call for an efficient municipal police force, and the call for fascist terror.

I cite another example of how manipulative the Stalinists attempted to be in this matter of 'social-fascism'. In August, 1930, the Daily Worker reader discovered from headlines that the "Yellow Socialist 'Forward' is in Favor of Lynching Negroes," that "Socialists Join Lynch Campaign Against Negroes".

The Jewish 'Forward', organ of the Socialist Party in New York, printed an article on Monday...that, at Camp Nitgedaiget, a Negro worker attempted to attack the girls of the Workers International Relief Camp. By this dastardly lie, the 'socialist' rag is trying both to spread lynching propaganda, and to join the Ku Kluxers of New York state in their attacks against the WIR camp.

The truth of this story may never be known, but regardless of whether

the Forward engaged in a little distortion of its own, in its report of alleged racial tension at a communist summer camp, it hardly followed that this put socialists in favor of lynching, or in the political camp of the Ku Klux Klan.⁴⁶

It is interesting to note that only a handful of these absurd headline distortions of socialist political activity ever appeared, and that, by 1932, they had begun to subside entirely. It is also an open question as to how many party members accepted this sort of bizarre rhetoric, just because it appeared in the Daily Worker. Still, the issue is not that such gross distortions of socialist politics appeared only so often, but that they appeared at all. For the doctrine of social fascism wreaked tremendous havoc on the Left.

Different parties in the world communist movement, coming out of different political traditions, and subject to diverse historical conditions, responded to the Stalinist order in different ways. How the heritage of the early Third Period played itself out in the politics and organizing practice of American Communism, in the 1930's, will be the subject of Part II of this work. The chapters in Part II will be structured around the following questions: What was the Party's ideology, and how was it communicated to the environment? What were its programs and organizational structures? How and why did these change over the course of the decade? What was the character and quality of the immediate relationships and face-to-face contacts that occurred as the rank and file communists organized in neighborhoods and factories? To what extent were these

contacts and activities placed into the context of a struggle around ideas? What kind of ideas?

In the concluding chapters, I will offer an assessment as to whether the American Communist party, in the years of the Popular Front, could be described as deradicalized. Finally, I will try to draw from the experience of this period some insights which might contribute to a deeper understanding of the nature of radical political organization itself. For now, however, in the chapter immediately following, I want to examine, generally, the impact of Stalinist ideas on the American Communist party itself. I begin with the events leading to the special convocation, by the Presidium of the Comintern Executive, of a Commission on the American Communist party. These hearings gave stark and brutal expression to the notion of party infallibility.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

¹Stephen F. Cohen, "Bolshevism and Stalinism," in Stalinism, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton and Co., 1977) p. 11

²Robert C. Tucker, "Stalinism as Revolution from Above," in Ibid., p. 78

³Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, The American Communist Party, (New York: Praeger Books, 1962), pp. 500-501

⁴Leonard Schapiro, The Origin of the Communist Autocracy (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1965), pp. 339-340

⁵Barrington Moore, Jr., Soviet Politics--The Dilemma of Power, (New York: Harper and Row, 1965; Torchbook edition), pp. 71-72

⁶Robert C. Tucker, ed., The Lenin Anthology (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1975), "On Cooperation", pp. 712-713

⁷Ibid., p. 454

⁸Ibid., p. 421

⁹All citations from The Lenin Anthology, "Draft Resolution on Party Unity," pp. 500-502

¹⁰Roy A Medvedev, Let History Judge (New York: Random House, 1971; Vintage Books edition, 1973), pp. 384-385

¹¹Lenin Anthology, "A Great Beginning," pp. 478, 483. Italics added

¹²See Lenin, 'Left-Wing' Communism, An Infantile Disorder (New York: International Publishers, 1940), p. 38. "We must be able...--if need be--to resort to all sorts of stratagems, artifices, illegal methods, to evasions and subterfuges, only so as to get into the trade unions, to remain in them, and to carry on Communist work within them at all costs."

¹³Ibid., p. 42

¹⁴"The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution," in Idem, Selected Works, vol. 2, pp. 46-47. This was written in April, 1917.

¹⁵"Report to the Eighth Party Congress," in Ibid., vol. 3, p. 123

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 123, 127

¹⁷Ibid., p. 127

¹⁸"Speech Delivered at an All-Russia Conference of Political Education Workers of Gubernia and Yuezd Education Departments, November 3, 1920" in Ibid., pp. 427-428. Italics added

¹⁹Ibid., p. 429

²⁰Ibid.

²¹"Report to the Eleventh Party Congress," in Ibid., p. 634

²²Idem, 'Left-Wing' Communism, p. 51

²³"Better Fewer, but Better," in Idem, Selected Works, vol. 3, pp. 714-716

²⁴Tucker, "Stalinism as Revolution from Above," p. 91. Italics added

²⁵Ibid., pp. 89, 91

²⁶"Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress," in Bruce Franklin, ed., The Essential Stalin (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1972; Anchor Books edition), p. 288. Here is a fuller citation of what Stalin told the Congress, held in 1934, about the role of organization: "After the correct line has been laid down, after a correct solution of the problem has been found, success depends on how the work is organised; on the organisation of the struggle for carrying out the Party line; on the proper selection of personnel; on checking the fulfilment of the decisions of the leading bodies... organisation work decides everything, including the fate of the political line itself, its success or failure..."

²⁷Cohen, p. 13

²⁸Stalin, "The Foundations of Leninism," in The Essential Stalin, p. 101

²⁹Lenin, 'Left-Wing' Communism, p. 23

³⁰Stalin, "Strategy and Tactics of the Russian Communists," Pravda, 1923, No. 56, reprinted in Strategy and Tactics of the Proletarian Revolution, compiled and arranged by V. Bystryansky, and M. Mishin (New York: International Publishers, 1936), p. 20

One wonders if Bystryansky and Mishin were credited as 'compilers and arrangers' because one could not edit the works of Stalin--only 'compile and arrange' them...

³¹Item, "Foundations of Leninism," p. 163

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., p. 166

³⁴Ibid., p. 178

³⁵Helmut Gruber, ed., Soviet Russia Masters the Comintern, (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974), p. 5

³⁶Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence (Moscow: Progress Publishers, Revised edition, 1975), p. 289. See also, Engels to Bebel, 10/15/75; Engels to Becker, 2/10/82; and Engels to Zasulich, 4/23/85.

³⁷Fernando Claudin, The Communist Movement, trans. by Brian Pearce (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), p. 47

³⁸Leon Trotsky, The Third International After Lenin (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 61

³⁹"Resolution of the Sixth Comintern Congress, 'The International Situation and the Tasks of the Comintern'," Daily Worker, 17 January, 1929. All the following citations from this document will be found on p. 3

For discussions of the events of 1923, the year designated by the Comintern as marking the start of the second period, that of capitalist stabilization, see Franz Borkenau, World Communism (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), Chapters XIII and XIV; and Gruber, Helmut, International Communism in the Era of Lenin, Part IV

⁴⁰As Theodore Draper points out: "The Left turn served Stalin's tactical ends...by signifying the ideological equivalent of a declaration of war on the Bukharanite 'Right wing'. It also outflanked the Trotskyist Left Opposition, which was confused and divided by the maneuver." Theodore Draper, American Communism and Soviet Russia (New York: Viking Press, 1963), p. 306

⁴¹"Resolution of the Sixth Comintern Congress"

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³"Theses of the Tenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International," Daily Worker 9 September, 1929, p. 2. Italics added.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Howe and Coser, p. 188

⁴⁶Daily Worker 31 October, 1929, p. 4; *Ibid.*, 27 August, 1930

PART TWO

THE CHARACTER OF POLITICAL PRACTICE IN THE AMERICAN
COMMUNIST PARTY, 1928-1935

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GENERAL IMPACT OF STALINIST IDEOLOGY ON THE
AMERICAN COMMUNIST PARTY

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern, held in August of 1928, and the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI, held in July of 1929, established economic determinism as one of the basic ideological pillars of the international Communist movement. A second pillar, that of party infallibility, made possible the total triumph of the Stalinist machine. This second principle was given its turn in the spotlight of the International at a meeting held between the others, in April of 1929, when the American Commission of the Presidium of the ECCI convened a hearing on factionalism in the American party. This chapter will examine, first, the way in which the doctrine of party infallibility was given clear explication at the American Commission. Secondly, I will discuss the special impact Stalinist notions had on the conceptual perspective of the leadership of the American Communist party, and how they tended to undermine and negate much that was creative and valuable in the Party's organizing campaigns during the course of the Great Depression.

- 1 -

The concept of party infallibility runs through all of Stalin's writings, from 1924 on. Yet it is in a modest booklet entitled 'Stalin's Speeches on the American Communist Party', that it is given its fullest and most direct exposition. Some background is perhaps required in order to explain the occasion of these little talks.

Since 1925 Jay Lovestone, and a number of other American communists, such as Benjamin Gitlow and Bertram Wolfe, had been exploring the notion of American exceptionalism. They argued that the United States economy, due to a number of special historical factors, would not decline along with the economies of Western Europe, but would flourish a few years longer.¹

By 1927, Lovestone's point of view commanded a majority within the American party. At its convention in the late summer of that year, Lovestone was elected executive secretary. When the Third Period line was introduced in August, 1928, Lovestone saw no reason to change his point of view. "On the Congress's position that a general crisis of capitalism was unfolding everywhere," Helmut Gruber writes,

Lovestone expressed the opinion that capitalism was still very resilient in the United States, that there was an economic recovery there in the middle of 1928, and that the crisis would come sometime in the future... The American opposition, led by Alexander Bittelman and William Z. Foster, hewed to the official line and predicted an imminent crisis of decaying American capitalism...²

The differences between the majority and minority factions were scheduled to be resolved at a convention in New York, in March, 1929.

Lovestone, still supported by a majority, felt sure of his ability to retain control of the organization. But before the con-

vention opened, two delegates from the Comintern arrived, holding specific organizational directives.

One of the organizational proposals advised the convention to appoint a new General Secretary--William Z. Foster. Another requested that the two chief factionalist, Lovestone and Bittelman, be withdrawn from work in the American party and put at the disposal of the Comintern in Moscow.³

A question arises as to the right by which the Comintern deigned so blatantly to interfere in the internal affairs of a constituent national party.

The Workers Communist Party of America, by its own philosophy and will, was not an autonomous institution, accountable only to its membership. It had, in 1919, agreed to become integral part of an international revolutionary movement, a movement whose goals and procedures were embodied and expressed in the constitutional structure of the Third International. No single component of this organization could determine whatever political direction it chose, without being held accountable, through the medium of the executive of the international, to the other components of the structure. Majority rule, in other words, had to be considered in terms of the organization as a whole, not any particular unit.

Majority rule, in complex organization, is not the principle that, in reference to a particular unit, fundamental questions may be resolved solely on the basis of the largest number of votes cast one way or another from within the unit. In the late 1940's, the CIO withdrew the right of the rank and file to elect communist leaderships, for example. Unions judged to be under communist influence were expelled, regardless of the sentiments of the members of those unions. If they wanted to have a communist led executive board, that

was their business; they just could not have it and stay within the walls of the CIO.

In terms of the formal theory of democratic organization, the notion of accountability through structure is perfectly valid. In any voluntary organization, where disputes over interpretation of basic policy emerge, higher administrative bodies have the right to intervene, and adjudicate what sorts of acts and decisions violate group principles, and which do not. By definition, and by structure, these bodies stand as representative of the membership as a totality. If the majority of the membership as a whole objects to the general direction of its policy making councils, it has the right to vote its leadership out of office.

All in the Bolshevik international accepted that a revolutionary movement could survive only if organizational unity and discipline were maintained in face of a much more strongly entrenched capitalism. Around crucial issues of principle, program, and direction, each member party was accountable, in Lenin's words, to "the formulated expression of the will of the whole."⁴ Each local group elected delegates to a World Congress which, in turn, elected an Executive Committee. This executive, and only this executive, had, between Congresses, the right to speak and act for the entire movement.⁵

The manner in which the Executive Committee of the Communist International intervened into the factional dispute of the American party, just before its 1929 convention, was blunt and revealing. Executive leaderships do not usually instruct constituent bodies as to whom they can, and cannot, elect to local office. However, the position of the International, that the American party's program

contradicted Comintern policy, and that the leadership of Jay Lovestone, therefore, was no longer acceptable, was not in formal violation of democratic structure.

Lovestone and his associates, though stung by the way the directive referred to them as individuals, publicly accepted the legitimacy of the Comintern action. But they refused either to surrender their program, or resign their leadership. They drew on every procedural recourse which constitutional structure made available to them. When, on the third day of the convention, at a meeting of the political committee, "the Comintern representatives demanded the immediate acceptance and endorsement of the Comintern's proposal to make Foster the General Secretary..., (e)very member of the Lovestone majority...voted against the proposal."⁶ Finally, in order to avoid being openly condemned as a right wing faction in fundamental opposition to the world revolutionary movement, Lovestone and Gitlow introduced a resolution which denounced Bukharin, and which asked that he be deprived of Comintern office.⁷ In response to this show of good behavior by the American majority, Stalin cabled the convention, and permitted it to choose its own Central Executive Committee. Stalin, however, "insisted uncompromisingly on the banishment of Lovestone and Bittelman to Moscow," and on "a review of the Convention's decisions by the Comintern."⁸

The convention went on to elect a Central Executive, and a leading Political Committee, which were dominated by Lovestone supporters. "Instead of waiting for the Comintern to react," Draper writes, "the convention's managers decided to take the fight to the Comintern."⁹ The convention body appointed a delegation of ten, including Lovestone

and Gitlow, to proceed to Moscow, and to appeal in person to the Comintern executive. However, one should not too quickly marvel at Lovestone's seemingly sincere commitment to the principles of democratic structure. Before he left, he worked out a plan with some supporters to transfer the ownership of party property to reliable members of the Right faction, should the Comintern rule against them.¹⁰

It was at the final sessions of the Commission called to review the American party's convention decisions, and hear the appeal of its delegates, that Stalin delivered his "Speeches on the American Communist Party". Stalin's very presence on the commission obviously signified that "more was at stake than the bickering of a small, weak party."¹¹

Stalin, personally, was about to make clear to the American delegation, and to the entire international movement, how he conceived the nature of the relationship between the part and the whole in a revolutionary organization. While, according to Draper, Stalin's speeches were never published in Russian, and translated only into English, the hearings were hardly secret. At the first session, "Over a hundred participants and spectators filled a large room in the Comintern's headquarters. Leaders from other parties put in regular appearances to see the spectacle, and to assess its political implications."¹² The outcome of the matter would be apparent to every group or section in the International.

The commission heard testimony, and was in official session, for a month. On May 6, Stalin delivered an address which expressed the formal findings of the commission. The decisions of the American

convention were rejected, and the original instructions of the Comintern confirmed. Lovestone and Bittelman were to remain in Moscow. The party's Central Executive Committee was to be re-organized. Its new leadership would have to reflect the policies of the Sixth Comintern Congress in the manner in which the executive of the Comintern itself stated these policies should be understood and applied.

Stalin, in his speech, urged the party members to put aside their factional differences, and unite under this final Comintern decision. However, for one who headed a movement which claimed to base its policies on the methods of reason and science, he used a strange metaphor. "...Comrades, the Comintern is not a stock market. The Comintern is the holy of holies of the working class."¹³ A 'holy of holies', of course, cannot be questioned; it is, by definition, an infallible source of authority.

Lovestone's and Gitlow's belief in their own infallibility, I suspect, was no less than Stalin's belief in the infallibility of the Comintern Executive, which, of course, was under the unofficial leadership and direction of Comrade Stalin. Immediately after the Commission's decisions had been announced, the American party heads secretly wired a cable home, instructing their co-factionalists to proceed with the plans for taking over the organization. "Take no action any proposals by anybody or cabled CI instructions," they wrote. "...Situation astounding, outrageous, can't be understood until arrival... Instantly finish preparations sell buildings..."¹⁴

On the whole, the American delegation behaved responsibly. Publicly and openly, they refused to accept the findings of the Commission. At a meeting on May 14, Gitlow read a declaration stat-

ing that they could not accept responsibility for what the Comintern had finally decided.

There are valid reasons for our being unable to accept this new draft letter, to assume responsibility before the Party membership for the execution of this letter, to endorse the inevitable, irreparable damage the line of this new draft letter is bound to bring to our Party.¹⁵

Non-compliance with a Comintern decision was, of course, equivalent to a break with the world revolutionary movement.

Stalin was both outraged, and in full control. He knew that the Americans were trapped by the very organizational principles to which they had turned for redress. For, having exhausted all channels of appeal, they had no choice now but to acquiesce, or become renegades. "Can you picture a Communist," Stalin told the meeting, "not a paper Communist, but a real Communist, avowing loyalty to the Comintern, and at the same time refusing to accept responsibility for carrying out the decisions of the Comintern?"¹⁶ The declaration of the Americans, Stalin said,

...proclaims the necessity of fighting the decisions of the Executive Committee of the Comintern as decisions, which, it is declared, are against the line of the Sixth Congress of the C.I... The authors of the declaration apparently forget that the interpreters of the decisions of the Comintern Congress are the Executive Committee and its Presidium alone, and not they. The authors of the declaration are mistaken if they think the American workers will believe their interpretation rather than the interpretation of the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Comintern.¹⁷

What is curious about this response--one might even say insidious--is the way it subtly negates any responsibility on the part of the Executive ever to review its own decisions. But why should a holy of holies ever have to review its own decisions?

As Stalin speaks, an unstated identification emerges between

the responsibility of an executive to set and interpret policy, as that policy is laid down in membership congresses and conventions, and the notion that those interpretations must invariably be correct for achieving the goals of the organization. The distinction is a fine one, but its clear recognition and enforcement by a revolutionary constituency is one of the few things which separates democratic from bureaucratic centralism.

Democratic centralism, according to Bolshevik theory, was a mode of political involvement which was designed to forge and maintain a strongly unified organizational will, at the same time that it enabled all constituents to enter directly into the decision-making process, and to hold authority accountable. Allegedly, under this structural arrangement, open discussion of issues and open criticism of leadership were to take place, continuing until consensual agreement around particular matters was reached. Membership had both the right and responsibility to challenge leaders, question their decisions, and instruct them to take local policy decisions to higher bodies. However, once decisions were made by the organization as a whole, at these higher levels of representation, they were binding upon all, and there could be no further discussion.

One of the major problems with the above theory is that, combining the notion of democratic centralism with that of a political vanguard, opens the door to potential disaster. For Bolshevik theory also argues that the working class, as a result of socialization and subjection to the ruling ideology, does not always grasp what, at a given moment, is the best political direction for itself, or identify with those values, concepts, and interests which are necessary for

its own liberation. Leadership, therefore, has to introduce those values and understandings into deliberation, and find ways of getting constituent bodies to accept them, and make them their own. As Lenin came to recognize towards the end of his active political life, this led to a situation in which there was no inherent way of preventing the reversal of political control. Leaders become satisfied with external conformity to their goals, with no concern as to whether change in ideological conviction has occurred. Thus, mechanism in thought and action tends to become a norm of group life. From the other side, rank and file seek recognition and support from those in authority, and thus behave out of a desire to receive approval, rather than out of any authentic belief in what they are doing. Again, this can lead to automatism in the quality of social and political life. The over-all consequence is that 'democratic' discussion and participation become mere acceptance of what has already been decided at the center, and what people sense the 'right' directions are. Democratic centralism collapses into what, conceptually, is its opposite, bureaucratic centralism.

I in no way mean to suggest that democratic centralism is identical with bureaucratic, nor that the second, in each and every revolutionary situation, automatically and inevitably will flow from the first. These are profound and difficult questions, which all movements based on the Leninist model of radical change must confront and deal with. For now, I only want to examine some of the events through which this change took place in relation to the American Communist party.

At the hearings of the American Commission, Stalin gave an

almost pristine demonstration of the ease with which the structures of democratic centralism can become instruments of bureaucratic control. He had made it clear to the Americans that only the Executive Committee and its Presidium had the right to interpret the decisions of the Comintern Congress. This was strong, but not inconsistent with the canons of organizational framework in general. He had also implied, however, that, once made, these interpretations were above challenge and criticism. Here, a subtle but destructive shift in the notion of organizational functioning is involved. In the next few paragraphs, I will try to make clear the nature of that shift.

Stalin, after his speech, moved that a poll be taken of each individual American delegate.

Every member of the delegation was called to the platform and asked point-blank: Do you accept the decision?

With three exceptions, they answered that they still disagreed with the decision but would accept it as a matter of discipline until the next discussion period.¹⁸

Two of the Americans, Max Bedacht and Alex Noral capitulated completely to the Comintern's decision. The third, Gitlow, rejected it outright, and declared not only that he continued to oppose the Presidium's demands, but that, on his return to the United States, he would continue to fight them. This, of course, was tantamount to an open and direct political break with the Communist International.

It is of deep significance that Stalin saw only the responses of Bedacht and Noral as satisfactory, the two who had, literally overnight, repudiated their views, and identified themselves totally with the position of the Comintern. The others, those who had accepted

political discipline, and the one who had not, he lumped all together.

...it is impossible to approve the fact that these eight comrades, after their views have suffered complete defeat, refuse to subordinate their will to the will of the higher collective, the will of the Presidium of the ECCI. True Bolshevik courage...consists in being strong enough to master and overcome one's self and subordinate one's will to... the will of the higher party body. Without that, there is no collective. Without that there is not, and cannot be any collective leadership.¹⁹

There is a question, here, of the relation between organizational discipline, and individual autonomy. For the very meaning of this passage turns on the interpretation which is attached to the phrase 'subordination of the will'. What kind of subordination is meant? And to what extent?

In Stalin's mind there was no difference between the seven who had agreed to abide by organizational decision, but had, at the same time, insisted on retaining their right to intellectual disagreement with leadership, and Gitlow, who had totally broken with the organizational framework of the Comintern. The former had subordinated their 'political will' to higher decision, but not their intellect, their right of autonomous judgment. In condemning them, Stalin, from his side, made it clear that what he sought was the abandonment of the critical faculties. For Stalin, acceptance of political discipline meant surrender of the mind as well, surrender of the use of reason itself.

The Third International had come a long way from the perspective and orientation of Lenin, who, at the Eleventh Party Congress, had precisely insisted upon the use of reason among Communists, and who, in his last address to the Comintern had spoken on the need of the entire movement to "study and study from scratch."²⁰ The Statutes

of the Comintern itself recognized the legitimacy of intellectual disagreement with executive decision, just so long as there was consistency of action around policy. The Fifth Comintern Congress, held in 1924, had made the principle explicit. "Once a decision has been reached at a CI Congress, a party congress, or by the leading party body, it must be carried out unconditionally, even if part of the membership or some of the local organizations do not agree with the decision."²¹ In those days the Comintern did not yet believe that it had the right to legislate how people should think. In their agreement to accept political discipline in regard to action, but not in regard to policy belief, the seven Americans were acting in accord with the Comintern constitution.

Without question, Stalin's use of democratic centralism to crush autonomy of thought, rather than as a mechanism to balance the right of political difference with the need for unity of action, could call upon many aspects of Leninist practice as precedent. Lenin, in his unquestioned certainty that Bolshevik control of the state was necessary for the achievement of socialism, imposed policy and stifled opposition whenever it suited his purpose. It is but a short step, for example, from the elimination of factions, in what is the only remaining political party with the right to govern, to the insistence that one believe exactly as the leadership tells one to believe.

There are simply no structural controls, as I indicated earlier, to prevent the deterioration of democratic centralism into a system of command and rote acceptance, buttressed by the self-deception that there has been genuine participation by all. Lenin should not really have been surprised when, towards the end of his life, he

witnessed the beginning collapse of the soviets into political bases for power-hungry bureaucrats, who themselves survived by fawning upon upon the central regime.

Still, this does not mean that there were no differences at all between Lenin's concept and application of democratic centralism, and Stalin's. "As long as fundamentals of Party theory and policy were not in dispute, Lenin treated his opponents as Party comrades," writes Roy Medvedev. "He patiently persuaded them, explained their mistakes, and tried to unite everyone who could be united around correct slogans." The very idea of 'correct slogans', of course, hints at the potential for intellectual repression lying at rest within the assumptions of democratic centralism. But I do not believe that the distinction which Medvedev finds between Leninist and Stalinist methods of leadership is artificial and without meaning. "Stalin was not in the least concerned with changing his opponents' minds or drawing them into the common work. He only sought to break them, to bend them to his will..." There is a crucial difference, here, between Stalin's and Lenin's approach to winning people over.

...Stalin was incapable of persuading his opponents, of subordinating them to the Party's ideological influence, of resolving disagreements by democratic methods, as Lenin had done. Resorting to administrative decrees, Stalin used the intra-party struggle to strengthen his personal position and power. Under such conditions, a normal struggle of ideas within the Party became impossible...²²

Without pretending that Lenin was a great humanist, who scrupulously observed the division between ideological struggle, and the imposition of ideas by force, let me suggest that the discord which eventually emerged between him and Stalin was not just ephemeral. It was solidly rooted in different theoretical concepts of revolutionary

leadership, and of the notion of democratic centralism itself.

When Stalin spoke of the necessity of the 'subordination of the will' in a revolutionary movement, he meant that all rational doubt as to the validity or wisdom of a given policy had to be cast out. If those responsible for policy said one thing today, but changed their minds the day following, then everyone else in the organization would have to do the same.

Recognition of the primacy of collective purpose in the determination of action is one thing. Subordination of the reasoning faculties to executive decision, however, is quite another. The latter destroys the basic distinction between organizational restriction, and intellectual repression. It destroys that tension, inherent in the meeting of individual and collective will, which, in any society, is essential for the realization of political freedom.

Stalinism allows for no room between immediate political action, and full conceptual conviction. It thus undermines the play of independent thought within the context of any sort of social movement or political party. Max Bedacht, in an article explaining the shift in perspective he had made at Moscow, openly drew the conclusions implicit in Stalin's notion of 'the subordination of the will.' He made it clear to the American party what Stalinism was all about.

This function of our international Party (leading and guiding the world revolution) is possible only with the universal acceptance within it of the principle of the subordination of the conceptions of any individual member or any section of the International to the decisions of the whole....

...We submit to International discipline because we consider that the revolutionary integrity, the revolutionary knowledge of the whole International is greater than, and superior to the integrity, experience, knowledge, etc. of any individual member or Party of the Comintern...

After we have argued the matter out with the Comintern and after the argument is settled by a definite decision, we not only accept the decision as a matter of discipline but we accept the correctness of the decision as a matter of recognizing the international and ideological superiority of the Comintern over ourselves...

It is manifestly impossible to win the Party and the working class for the political line of our International Party if we ourselves have reservations as to the correctness of this line only as a matter of formal discipline. It is manifestly impossible to mobilize the Party for a CI decision or to win the working class for the CI line if our thunderous assertion of the principle of International leadership and of the indispensability of International guidance have an either articulate or inarticulate undertone to the effect that this leadership is wrong and that this guidance is, in practice, incorrect.

My own acceptance of the Comintern decision, and the very formal character of this acceptance, therefore, confronted me with the duty to change my point of view on the issues involved and to adopt that point of view to the one of our International Party...23

One will be hard put to find, in all of Stalinist literature, as blatant and disturbing an exposition of the anti-intellectual philosophy in which the concept of party infallibility is rooted.

Bedacht's assertion that, it is 'manifestly impossible' to work for a policy, and yet have reservations, denies the most common attribute of human thought: its lack of absolute certainty. His notion attempts to transform the Communist into some sort of super human being, beyond the unsureness and sense of vulnerability that many people experience and feel as an underlying concomitant of action. Stalinism is congenitally unable to recognize that workers in a labor movement are more likely to accept leadership from those

who are honest about their potential for fallibility, than from those who, first, state that scientific insight provides them with infallible judgement, and then, in order to demonstrate that they can never be wrong, constantly change what they say they believe.

There is a deep contempt for the intellect of common people in Bedacht's analysis, a contempt which accurately reflects the Stalinist ideology that is the source of its ideas. There were alternatives available to Stalin in his speech to the American party, for example. He could have granted, while speaking before the Commission, that the highest executive authority of the revolutionary vanguard was composed of human beings, who, like everyone else, were capable of making decisions only in terms of their best understanding. Grounded in scientific method, their reasoning was subject, inherently, to error and correction. But in the heat of international and revolutionary struggle, Stalin might have reminded his audience, hard and difficult decisions had to be made. Between meetings of the World Congress, it was the responsibility of the Comintern Executive to render final interpretation, and, in line with the basic Statute of the organization, it was the responsibility of individual sections to carry those interpretations out, whether or not they wholly agreed with them. Unless, and until, executive policy were redirected by the entire body, such policy was binding. It was the responsibility of the American leadership to accept that interpretation, or get out of the International. The prestige of the Revolution would keep the American party as a whole within the walls of the world movement.²⁴

A thorough and consistent advocate of democratic centralism

might have gone even further. He might have emphasized that all executive policy decisions were subject to review by the Comintern Congress, and that the Congress was not only under mandate to meet every two years, an extraordinary session might be convened, if at least half the body wished.²⁵ Stalin, to express it mildly, chose not to make such an emphasis. In fact, the Executive Committee of the Communist International violated its own constitutional mandate, and did not put out the call for another world congress until 1935, a hiatus of seven years. As far as I can discover, none of the party leaderships remaining after 1929 ever seems to have registered a complaint.

- 2 -

Stalin's success, during 1928 and 1929, in establishing political and ideological hegemony marks a well known turning point in the Bolshevik movement. Still, it is essential to recognize that the victory of Stalinism, as a regime and a philosophy, did not mean that all Communists, everywhere and at all times, understood their experience in identical ways, or carried identical beliefs around in their heads.

The atmosphere of American communism, I am suggesting, was more a hodge-podge than a monolith. The movement was criss-crossed by opposing philosophies of revolutionary organization. But there was an even more complicating factor. For Stalinist organization would function and maintain itself only to the extent that the opposing concepts of political action at its center remained implicit and unrecognized by the movement's own members.

Within the framework of given political tasks, the Communists were often recognized for their initiative, their intelligence, their forcefulness, their immediate reliability. As long as they did not have to deal with decisions and reversals handed down by highest leadership, they could be acute political actors, capable of both principle and independence. Confronted with executive mandate, however, the contradictions inherent in their ideological framework became activated, and independence would collapse.

It is precisely my thesis that this grafting together of two such incompatible notions of radical struggle, the one focusing on initiative and responsibility, the other, on learning how to see things as authority indicated one should see them, gave to the quality of Communist life a double aspect. The first aspect tended to deradicalize the organization by taking it away from the realms of ideas and principled human contact. The other prevented intellectual and moral collapse by keeping just those attributes alive and viable.

This strange dialectic of practice haunts all movements that look to the ideas of democratic centralism as a basis for political organization. While I do not believe that mechanism and automatism necessarily become controlling elements in the day to day functioning of all Communist parties, certainly these were major factors in the life of the groups of the Comintern era. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I want to examine some of the ways in which these clashing modes of political existence made themselves felt in the American Communist party.

I want to touch upon, first, how Stalinist theories of prac-

tice undermined the Party's efforts to attain what it considered its over-riding political goal, the winning of ideological change in the consciousness of those whom it tried to organize. It is revealing, also, to consider, in the writings of individuals who have left the Party, their attempts to assess how and why they accepted certain actions of the Soviet state. Finally, I will discuss a document which formalized the notions of Stalinist thought for American Communists, J. Peters' little booklet, The Communist Party, A Manual of Organization, which appeared in July, 1935. It says a great deal about the kinds of ideas with which the Communists were prepared to live.

In Bolshevik theory, all social behavior--even the most personal and informal--is seen as an illustration of ideological belief, as an expression of the value system through which one makes life choices and relates to others in one's world. Therefore, the defining constant of any intervention or organizational task is not immediate purpose, but the long range end of getting people to accept and identify with the values and assumptions of theory. The real issue for organizers in a radical movement, however, is not that the goal of action is to change consciousness, but how such change is to be brought about. What I have tried to establish so far in this work is that the Stalinist conception of 'the character and methods of struggle'²⁶ is an inherently mechanist one.

It is a given of Stalinist ideology that such organizational effects as the 'correct' line, the well-attended community meeting, the angry, outspoken vanguard leader, the sharp and pungent slogan,

the pointed campaign around a local or national controversy, and the mass demonstration, will automatically build to a fundamental restructuring of political awareness among critically significant masses. When these masses fail to behave as theory predicts, therefore, when they fail to become radicalized by an economic depression, for example, or by the dynamic of a militant activism, Stalinist logic prohibits consideration that its own methodology or concept of change or direction of the moment might be at fault.

George Charney, recalling his reactions as New England organizational secretary in the years of the Popular Front, describes the practical consequences of such an outlook. "The theory was simple and devastating," he writes. "Given a situation in which the party was deemed infallible, reverses were invariably attributed to the failure of organization."²⁷ Analytic focus would be thrown on such issues as lack of planning, inadequate concern or commitment from the party workers, insufficient consistency of effort, poor style or lack of sensitivity in the way cadres interacted with potential constituencies. Such factors could have actually been present and operating, of course; the problem is that they were the only ones it was ever permissible to think about.

In these ways, a Stalinist movement is always able to sidestep the open evaluation of its own ideas. The structure of rationality by which it is defined leads it to deal with shortcomings of practice through what Howe and Coser refer to as "a variety of bureaucratic conceits."

Such as: the line is correct, always has been correct but (somehow) is never properly carried out. Or: if the members drove themselves just a little harder the... union with the masses might be achieved...28

Criticism and assessment and re-evaluation are pointed always to the surface of action, never to the ideas or political analysis on which that action was based.

Since it would never permit its militants to tackle their own assumptions, the Party was generally impotent when it came to instructing these cadres on how to be open and innovative, and even natural, with those whom they were trying to organize. This was especially true in the early years of the Third Period. Later, when the revolution seemed, to them, to be further away, they relaxed a little, and improved their ability to make contacts, and work closely with, non-Party people.

An article which appeared in the Daily Worker of June of 1932 illustrates the kind of problems the Party had in reaching out to the American proletariat in those days. 'Why Workers Find It Difficult to Stay in the Party', said the title. The account was from a reader who had "urged a shopmate to come with me to a meeting." The shopmate went to one meeting. The next week he refused. Why? When the problem of Daily Worker distribution was taken up, "My shopmate was asked whether he had any time for that.

Then when the question of leaflet distribution came up he again was asked to do that. But that isn't all. He was also asked whether he could work with the Negro director. Then, learning he only worked four days a week, he was asked to assist the unemployed council.

But the comrades did not stop, the writer complains. His friend was asked to attend the food workers' meeting and join the union;

to join the I.L.D., and help set up an affair that was to take place the following week; to buy a ticket to the affair for 35 cents. The friend "also bought the Labor Unity for 10 cents, the Communist for 20 cents, Working Woman for 5 cents, Daily Worker for 5 cents, and the Western Worker for 5 cents."¹⁹ Overwhelmed, the potential recruit never came back to another meeting.

Stories like the above have a certain wry humor about them. Yet, at bottom, the behavior recounted here was destructive of the Party on all levels. The Party was tremendously critical of such unreflective modes of involvement. Articles and discussions attacking mechanical behavior were a constant factor of the Party's ideological work with membership. But the phenomenon remained, I suggest, because it was bred by the Party's own theoretical vision of the efficacy of structure.

The reliance upon structure allows one to refrain from making judgements about particular situations. New members are to be 'involved'; therefore, everyone pounces upon the hapless recruit with their own particular task or responsibility. No one takes stock of whether they are about to frighten off a potential supporter with frenzied and unrealistic demands.

The irony, of course, is that, when it came to matters of policy and decision by authority, withdrawal from individual judgement was precisely what Stalinism sought. But, at the same time, no task oriented organization can sustain itself if its rank and file transfer uncritical acceptance of instruction over to the carrying out of specific assignment. Reality is much too complex. So the Party was in the unenviable position of having to negate in

one area of political life the very attitudes it promoted in another.

There can be no question as to the independence and initiative which the Communists showed, in the thirties and forties, in carrying out the daily, dirty, thankless, and sometimes dangerous tasks of political organization. One did not have to like the Stalinists to know that they would be where they said, when they said they would be there, no matter how routine or drudging or threatening the tasks confronting them. The Communists won power and trust in the newly developing CIO, Howe and Coser recognize,

...by the traditional methods of winning power and trust in American unions: they became the organizers. If there was dirty work to do, they were ready. If leaflets had to be handed out on cold winter mornings before an Akron rubber plant or a New York subway station, the party could always find a few volunteers. If someone had to stick his neck out within the plants, a Communist was available...

The point should not be exaggerated. Never were the Communists more than a minority among the CIO organizers, and often a disruptive and distrusted minority... But the Communists were the best organized group within the CIO...³⁰

John L. Lewis brought the Communists into the C.I.O., and gave them positions of leadership, because he believed establishing industrial unionism would be almost impossible without their help. Labor, Bert Cochran writes, had always come out the loser in the minds of massed confrontations which, Lewis knew, lay ahead.

...It was precisely the superior power of big capital in physical encounter and collision that had bred the AFL's habits of caution and temerity... Consequently, Lewis...could not do without support of radicals-- and in the 1930's radicals meant primarily Communists...

Non-Communist radicals were capable of organizing as well, Cochran states, and had proved themselves in strikes in Minneapolis and Toledo. But, "whatever their qualities, they were few in number."³¹ If, in the thirties, one needed commitment, energy, and competence

in organizing, it was to the Communists one had to turn.

Nor was it only in the labor movement that the Communists gave effective leadership. They brought spark and autonomy to the political activism developing on the nation's campuses in the early years of the depression. "No matter how hostile one may be toward the politics of these young Communists," Howe and Coser state,

honesty requires the admission that some of them were among the best of their generation, among the most intelligent, selfless, and idealistic. No one was likely to joining the YCL in 1932 out of ordinary careerism or because it was the 'thing to do'. YCL membership could mean hardship and sacrifice.³²

The willingness to stand up to convention, to use themselves independently and forcefully, and even to risk physical harm, was in evidence, as well, in the work of Communists organizing among Southern Negroes and sharecroppers. "... (W)hatever else may be said about the party during the early thirties," Howe and Coser grant, "it would be ungenerous to deny that those of its members who 'went South' often showed admirable courage."³³

Organizers cannot win the trust and following of people if they must run to a phone or wait for an order before ever coming up with an idea or making a decision. They must be capable of acting on the spur of the moment with insight and intelligence. This, the best of the Communist organizers and rank and file knew how to do. Yet the Communists combined the autonomy and strength needed for political struggle with a readiness to surrender judgment to organizational fiat.

This mesh of opposites can be understood, I propose, by recognizing that committed Stalinists of the thirties and forties

moved in relation to diametrically opposed systems of action. Far from being clear-eyed, single-purposed, and ideologically consistent, Communist militants came to internalize sets of ideas and values which were incongruent. The result was that individuals who showed courage and initiative when it came to working on particular tasks in the field, typically abandoned critical thinking if any sort of challenge to the structure of Party authority were involved. There was much more going on, here, than just organizational solidarity in the face of political enemies.

A key area in which the principled refusal to challenge Party decision led Communist activists to finesse, as it were, damaging realities, was that dealing with the purges of the middle and late thirties. One starts by giving the organization benefit of doubt; unless one draws a line somewhere, one ends by refusing to question anything the organization does.

In June, 1937, Eugene Dennis, who, over the course of the preceding years, had emerged as a national leader in the American Party, was recalled to the Comintern. He and his wife, Peggy, had worked at the Comintern in Moscow once before, in 1931.

Our immediate concern in settling-down for the long stay was to get a room large enough to include Tim (their son), preferably one in the old section of the Luxe. When Gene called from his office at the Anglo-American section to tell me I should go look at Room 28, I hurried down the familiar long, dark, first floor corridor. Heavy webbing crisscrossed over the doors, knobs, and keyholes of numbers 28 and 29. In three separate places on each door were heavy wax seals that gleamed red in the dim light...

The wife of an English comrade whom I had previously known slightly came out of room 30.

"Hello", she stopped, tea kettle in hand...

I explained I had been told to look at Room 28...

"Well, you had better not touch those trappings, against the law, you know."

I asked did she know what infectious disease had been quarantined here, and how long the fumigation seals had been on...

"You are a new one, aren't you? Those were Mingulin's rooms; did you know him? They came for him during the night, they did, and his family got put out a couple of weeks later. Those are security police seals, they are, and you musn't touch them..."

Mingulin. A round-faced, mild mannered instructor at the Lenin school, later assigned to the Anglo-American section of the Comintern. One of the few Russian teachers who had spoken English... And now orthodox Mingulin had been taken by the security police...

Gene came home, pleased... I told him about the sealed doors and what the English neighbor had said...

"The room is unimportant," he replied slowly. "We can take it; its just a room. As for the other, something is happening..."

So many comrades were gone from the Comintern, he told me... "When I asked about them or assumed they were abroad, people shook their heads and whispered, 'Don't ask questions; they're just gone, that's all.'"

Curled on the bed, I watched him warily. Gene paced and we each avoided the questions that hung silently in the air between us.

We did not know the extent of the purges, Peggy Dennis continues,

but we cannot claim we did not know what was happening. We knew that the Comintern had been decimated. We read of the public trials... but we read the accounts and we accepted them. We saw it as part of the brutal realities of making revolution... We accepted the belief of infallibility of our leaders, the wisdom of our Party...

...In 1961, and again in 1965 when for a short time people talked to me freely of those years, I found that our reactions in the Luxe had not been too different than those of the Soviet citizens. When the security police came for one's neighbor, one shrugged uneasily. The evidence must be there, the Party would not act otherwise...

When they came for a family member or close friend, Dennis continues,

"you knew it was a horrible mistake; you believed it would be rectified in a few days."³⁴ What people believed as days dragged into years, or as loved ones disappeared into labor camps, or as reports

filtered back of executions in dark cellars, Peggy Dennis does not say. But the idea that the Party could consciously and deliberately violate the norms of socialist revolution remained an unacceptable challenge to existing assumptions.

Another historical juncture where reliance upon authority was used to overcome a plausible resistance to policy from the top was the Hitler-Stalin pact. Al Richmond, once editor of the Party's West Coast newspaper, describes his own reaction, which, it is fair to assume, was not atypical.

...The treaty came as a megaton shock, stunning, sudden, wrenching. The Russians said later, with justice, that they had uttered some warnings that should have reduced the element of surprise...

Uncertainties, explanations to one's self that did not fully explain, and with all that, one solid rock of faith. They, I said, must know what they are doing...35

They must know what they are doing: a theme which appears again and again in the literature of Communist reminiscence. It is the same idea used by Peggy and Eugene Dennis to justify to themselves the legitimacy of the purges. By each time relying upon the wisdom of structure, one eventually surrendered the whole of one's critical faculty to organization.

The Stalinist belief-system did not stop at the mere acceptance of decision by authority, however; policy had always to be portrayed as perfect and above any sort of reservation. For example, once the shock of a treaty with Hitler wore off, American Communists began to accept that it made some sense if read as a defensive measure on the Soviet Union's part. The allies, after all, had been decidedly cool to any sort of collective security arrangement for restraining

Hitler; then the Munich pact had been signed, which made the allies appear quite willing to look the other way, as long as it was an eastward direction in which the German armies marched. Where the vital interests of the Soviet state were concerned, Stalin could play the same sort of political game as the Western democracies.

Whether or not one agrees with the substance of the above argument, a plausible case exists for justifying the Hitler-Stalin pact in terms of the mandates of political realism.³⁶ What cannot be justified, however, is the enthusiasm with which the American party celebrated the agreement.

"Our troubles," Richmond proposes, "essentially stemmed from a compulsion to turn Soviet diplomatic necessity into an American political virtue... (W)e had signed no treaty with the German state; diplomatic considerations need not have constrained us from recognizing, even then, a dichotomy in the war."³⁷ But this begs the question. For, if indeed such an alternative was available to the American communists, then, why did they not follow it?

Richmond seems to forget that, in those days, even the slightest regret or melancholy at Stalin's having been forced into a deal with the Nazis would have been read, by the Comintern, as harboring, somewhere, quiet reservations about the purity and special revolutionary quality of Soviet foreign policy. The Soviet Union could only be seen and portrayed as standing above the sorts of Realpolitic and international intrigue with which bourgeois diplomacy was inherently tainted. "A Smoking Blow at Munich Treachery and Aggression" read the headline of the Daily Worker's front page editorial on the day the paper announced the treaty. "American public opinion," the

editorial insisted,

...is penetrating through the screen of falsifications
of the Soviet Union's *great strike for world peace*...38

The pact could have reasonably been defended in terms of diplomatic necessity, as a 'resolute Bolshevik response to capitalist maneuverings', let us say. But by no stretch of the imagination could it be read as 'a great stroke for world peace'. Hitler was now free to invade Poland. He could risk war with England and France without having to worry about a second front in the East.

If anything, tensions had been heightened, and the other shoe soon dropped. The week following the Daily Worker proclamation, Germany, on September 1, 1939, invaded Poland. World War II was underway. A little over two weeks later, on September 17, Russia conveniently followed suit, and crossed Poland's eastern border.

The American Communist party might have gained some credibility, and strengthened its position on the Left, had it shown the kind of critical honesty which Richmond, in retrospect, recommends. But Stalinism, as an ideology and political philosophy, allows for no such historical ambiguities and uncertainties, for no diversities in interpretation, for no withholding of full political support from whatever structure decides. The American Communists could not have taken any other direction than they did, without having come into fundamental conflict with what they were.

These implications of Stalinist thought, in which reliance upon structure is transformed into its immediate corollary, party infallibility, were formalized for the American Communist party in J. Peters' booklet, The Communist Party, A Manual of Organization.

Peters was an Hungarian Communist whom, it seems, the Comintern sent over to work with the Americans. In July, 1935, the American party published his text on organizational structure.

Peters' Manual demonstrates an almost perfect contempt for people's ability to think, make judgements, and remain skeptical in the face of unconfirmed and highly uncertain assertions. "How will the Communist Party convince the majority of the working class that a revolution is necessary?" Peters asks. Since the book is in the form of a catechism, not an inquiry, Peters categorically provides the reader with the correct answer to this question. "The Communist Party can do this by becoming the trusted vanguard, the beloved organizer and leader of the struggle of the working class."³⁹ The 'trusted vanguard'. The 'beloved organizer'. Clichés abound in Stalinist literature, as they abound in all work designed, not to stimulate thought, but to induce stupor.

Peters' Manual made explicit for the American party the Stalinist principle that ideological struggle was to cease once one became a Communist. "It is clear," he states, "that basic principles and decisions, such as, for example, the Program of the Communist International, cannot be questioned in the Party." While every political group will have certain basic principles and policies that define its reason for being, and thus, in that sense, 'cannot be questioned', Peters' formulation, in accord with general Stalinist practice, leaves no room at all for common human uncertainty.

The list of things 'we do not question' is an exhaustive and stultifying one.

We cannot imagine a discussion, for example, questioning the correctness of the leading role of the proletariat in our revolution, or the necessity for the proletarian dictatorship. We do not question the theory of the necessity for the forceful overthrow of capitalism. We do not question the correctness of the revolutionary theory of the class struggle laid down by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. We do not question the counter-revolutionary nature of Trotskyism.

We do not question the political correctness of the decisions, resolutions, etc., of the Executive Committee of the C.I., of the Convention of the Party, or of the Central Committee after they are ratified. Otherwise, every undercover agent of the bourgeoisie and every sympathizer of the renegades would have an opportunity of continually raising their counter-revolutionary theories in the Units, Sections, etc., and make the members spend time and energy in discussing such questions, thus not only disrupting the work of the Party, but also creating confusion among the less experienced and trained elements in the Party. (As a matter of fact, this is what enemies of the Party are always trying to do in the name of 'democracy'.)40

Peters' formulation demonstrates the way in which reliance upon structure translates into the negation of ideological struggle. Uncertainty and hypothesis and rational doubt are simply not allowed. The lessons of Stalin's speech to the American Commission, at the Comintern in 1929, have been well learned.

Stalinism as radical catalytic agent remains lifeless and inert. One need not agree with the thrust of Lenin's writings, for example, to recognize their cogency, their ability to stimulate thought, and their acceptance of conflict and contradiction as inherent in revolutionary organization. The contrast with Stalinist literature is extreme. Cliché-ridden, dull, and intellectually arid, it resolves all contradictions by fiat, and proclaims possession of absolute and final truth. The job of the rank and file is not to question or probe what has been raised, but simply to accept and promulgate it.

A revolutionary organization has the right to insist on political discipline; otherwise, it can never make its revolution. But to in-

insist on absolute intellectual agreement as a precondition for action destroys the only tool available to both reason and practice for self-correction. Questioning does not undermine acceptance. It makes acceptance rational. For if I am not permitted to question or reserve judgement as I test out a principle, on what logical basis am I to resolve whether I find it valid?

When the contradictions and questions precipitated by a rigid and mechanical democratic centralism became too obvious to ignore, people either left the movement, or blamed their failure to understand on their own inadequacies. The party must know what it is doing, they said reassuringly to themselves and to each other, all the while allowing that harsh and contemptuous Stalinist façade to the outside world. Without comprehending the process, for they had no terms with which to make it articulate, they fell back on the principle of party infallibility to allay the very uncertainties and problems that the principle itself created. Ironically, they affirmed and justified their surrender of reason through resort to the very logic by which they denied to themselves that they were surrendering it: the party must know what it is doing.

Independent judgement, critical thinking, and ideological struggle are essential attributes of revolutionary action. That they must be exercised within a need for organizational unity and collective responsibility is simply a brute fact of political life, with which all political groups must contend. The problem, however-- among the most serious that a revolutionary socialism has to face-- is that, in the years of Stalinist hegemony, critically intelligent people, members of the party, as well as those grappling with the

issue of whether to join, never looked deeply enough into the complex and highly dubious set of assumptions on which entire programs of political action were based.

The remainder of this work examines the history, character, and behavior of American Communism in terms of this strange coalescence between the Party's long-range ideological commitments to socialism and its rootedness in Stalinist notions of political manipulation. Against the background of their interaction, I will argue, a fully deradicalized Party, across the years of 1937 and 1938, came into being.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

¹For slightly varying interpretations of American Exceptionalism, see Howe and Coser, Ch. IV, and Draper, Ch. 12

²Gruber, Soviet Russia, p. 195

³Draper, p. 399

⁴Lenin, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," Selected Works, vol. 1, p. 394

⁵"The world congress elects the Executive Committee of the Communist International, which is the directing body of the Communist International in the period between its world congresses. The Executive Committee is responsible only to the world congress." "Statutes of the Communist International Adopted at the Second Comintern Congress," in The Communist International, 1919-1943, Documents, ed. by Jane Degras, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 164

⁶Draper, p. 400

⁷Ibid., p. 401

⁸Ibid., p. 402

⁹Ibid., p. 403

¹⁰Gruber, Soviet Russia, p. 197; Draper, pp. 405-406

¹¹Draper, p. 407

¹²Ibid.

¹³"Stalin's Speeches on the American Communist Party" (San Francisco: Proletarian Publishers, n.d.), p. 15

¹⁴Draper, p. 416. The telegram was published in the Daily Worker on June 27, 1929

¹⁵Stalin cites these passages from Gitlow. See "Stalin's Speeches," p. 53

¹⁶"Stalin's Speeches," p. 53

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Draper, p. 420. *Italics added.*

¹⁹"Stalin's Speeches," p. 36

²⁰For Lenin's admonition that Communists must use reason, see above, Chapter II, note 21.

For his advice about restudying the basics of revolutionary organization and struggle, see his address to the Fourth Comintern Congress, the last public appearance he would make before that body. Lenin begins to show, in this speech, a growing concern about using the Russian Revolution as the absolutely correct model for revolutionary practice in all other parts of the world. "At the Third Congress in 1921, we adopted a resolution on the organisational structure of the Communist Parties and on the methods and content of their activities," he told the Comintern.

The resolution is an excellent one, but it is almost entirely Russian, that is to say, everything in it is based on Russian conditions. This is its good point, but it is also its failing. It is its failing because I am sure that no foreigner can read it... Not because it is written in Russian--it has been excellently translated into all languages--but because it is thoroughly imbued with the Russian spirit... I have the impression that we made a big mistake with this resolution, namely, that we blocked our own road to further success... we have not learnt how to present our Russian experience to foreigners. All that was said in the resolution has remained a dead letter. If we do not realise this, we shall be unable to move ahead. I think that after five years of the Russian revolution the most important thing for all of us, Russian and foreign comrades alike, is to sit down and study... we must take advantage of every moment of respite from fighting, from war, to study, and study from scratch.

Lenin, "Five Years of Russian Revolution and the Prospects of the World Revolution," Selected Works, vol. 3, p. 670

²¹"Statutes of the Communist International Adopted at its Fifth Congress," The Communist International, vol. 2, p. 118. The citation appears in the very first section of the Statutes, under 'principles'...

²²Medvedev, p. 47. *Italics added.*

²³Max Bedacht, "The Comintern Address to our Party," Daily Worker 3 July, 1929, p. 4. Italics added.

²⁴"Stalin's Speeches," p. 26

²⁵The Communist International, vol. 2, p. 118. "The world congress," read the Statutes,

discusses and decides the most important programatic, tactical, and organizational questions connected with the activity of the CI as a whole as well as of its individual sections. The world congress alone has the right to change the programme and statutes of the CI.

Ordinary world congresses of the CI shall be held at least once in two years. The date of meeting shall be determined by the ECCI...

An extraordinary world congress of the CI may be convened at the request of the parties which, at the preceding CI congress, together accounted for at least one-half of the total voting strength.

²⁶See above, Chapter One, p. 35, note 39

²⁷George Charney, A Long Journey, with an Introduction by Michael Harrington (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), p. 166

²⁸Howe and Coser, p. 217

²⁹"Why Workers Find It Difficult to Stay in the Party," Daily Worker 3 June, 1932, p. 4

³⁰Howe and Coser, p. 275

³⁷Richmond, p. 285

³⁸"A Smoking Blow at Munich Treachery and Aggression," Daily Worker 25 August 1939, p. 1.

³⁹J. Peters, The Communist Party, A Manual On Organization, (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1935; reprint ed., San Francisco: Proletarian Publishers, 1975), p. 10

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 26-27

CHAPTER FIVE

TOWARDS MORE OPEN STRUGGLE: POLITICAL PRACTICE IN THE
LATER THIRD PERIOD

The intent of this chapter is to apply the framework for the study of radical activism, developed in Part One, to the over-all political orientation of the American Communist party in the early to middle nineteen thirties. I will examine, first, the Party's ideological position in these years, along with certain of its major programs and organizing activities. Then I will turn to the quality of its ideological involvement with people, that is, to the character of its efforts to reach the consciousness of potential constituencies, and to re-orient the conceptual basis of political belief. This methodology will aid in later assessments of the extent to which the Party's dynamic, in the decade of the thirties, conformed to a model of radical practice.

What emerged over the course of this period was a strange amalgam. For, from 1928 to the end of 1934 the Party's ideology and program were consistently radical. Class against class was the slogan throughout, and not until after the 1936 elections did the Party make full peace with Roosevelt and offer unqualified support to the New Deal. Yet, beginning in 1932, there was, beneath the

constant of program, so to speak, a significant effort to transform the quality of the Party's interventions into people's daily lives, an attempt to shift the quality of its struggle around ideas and behavior towards a greater openness. While the change was not total, and there were significant exceptions, in general the Party's activist tone became less mechanical, manipulative, and strident. Its practice began to reflect more closely the notion of ideological struggle, as I have attempted to define that concept through the radical paradigm.

For any Communist party, the most important agency in formally establishing contacts with the groups it seeks to organize and educate is its newspaper. Ever since What Is To Be Done?, Communists had viewed a party organ, of one sort or another, as the essential instrument in building a common consciousness among disparate workers. The function of such a journal was to educate people both to the ideology of the movement, and to the kinds of programs and activities which were in use to bring that ideology to material fruition. Such was the role the Daily Worker saw itself as playing. "Elementary theoretical propaganda training gives a broader perspective and deeper understanding for the daily mass activities," stated an article on the editorial page of the Worker in January, 1932.

Mass agitation and mass propaganda are essential to make clear to the masses the aim of the campaigns and struggles that they are to participate in. Our agitation must be simple, factual, convincing...

The Daily Worker, agitational and propaganda literature must be developed as the most basic forms of agitation and propaganda.¹

In the pages of the Worker one finds endless material that openly defines and discusses the ideological basics which the Party was

attempting to project at any given moment.

In the years of the Third Period, these ideological categories, and the programs and organizational tasks derived from them, were consistent with the radical paradigm. The primary assumptions of the paradigm--the need for mass social force, the nature of class struggle, the legitimacy of violent overthrow, the worker as member of an international political class, the inseparability of theory and practice--were constantly present in the pages of the Daily Worker.

One finds there, at this time, excerpts from the writings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, revolutionary slogans spread out across the tops and bottoms of pages, periodic glimpses at "how well" the workers and farmers of the Soviet Union were doing, regular dispatches on the Communist parties of other countries, and a never-ending flow of reprints of official Comintern documents. When the Daily Worker wanted fillers, it turned to the classic works of Marxism, and looked for an apt quotation: "Executive of modern state is but a committee for managing common affairs of bourgeoisie"; war is a product of "the imperialist character of international capitalism".² In June of 1933, a series of reviews of key works in the literature of Marxism began to appear. Milton Howard started the series off with a discussion of The Critique of the Gotha Program. "The basic question which Marx treats in the critique," Howard informed American workers, who, it may be surmised, could not have been less interested, "is the seizure of political power by the revolutionary proletariat and the setting up of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the form of government which must supersede the rule by the capitalist class."³ It may be taken for granted that, despite the Third Period Theses

and the Great Depression, none of this had very much resonance in the American working class. But it is much easier to be dismissive of this rhetoric today, since we know how things came out. At the time the Communists, precisely because they accepted the crude determinist outlook of Stalinism, were attempting to introduce radical notions into the politics of American labor as best as they knew how.

The theme of these years was given frank expression in a January, 1932 article which announced the opening of a massive membership drive. "Workers! Join the Revolutionary Party of the Working Class!" a full page headline called. The appeal to American workers was based on an undiluted Marxian ideology.

The Communist Party organizes the working class for the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of capitalism--the struggle for power, for the proletarian dictatorship as the prerequisite for the building of socialism, the transition to the classless Communist society.

The closing paragraphs translated this far-reaching ideological stance into the programmatic demands of the period.

Fight against imperialist war! Defend the Soviet Union! Fight against wage cuts and for the 7 hour day! Fight the Hoover-Wall St. starvation and war program! Fight and destroy the lynch and murder terror against the Negro masses! Build the revolutionary unions of the Trade Union Unity League! Build the unions directly in the decisive industries! Fight for Workers Unemployment Insurance! Build the Unemployed Councils!

Join the Communist Party--the revolutionary political party of the American working class, the American section of the Communist International. Fight for the overthrow of capitalism--for a government of workers and farmers.⁴

Stridency of program and slogan, according to the framework developed

in this study, does not exhaust the meaning of 'radical', or imply that a given leadership understands what its desired audience is prepared to hear. But if these statements, however incongruent they may have been with existing levels of consciousness among American workers, are not accepted as reflecting the position of an overtly revolutionary party, then I am at a loss as to what other criteria might be suggested.

The radical nature of the Party's ideology and program was given formal and explicit statement in the Manifesto which the American Communists issued at their Eighth Convention, held in April of 1934. The New Deal came under direct and bitter attack. The industrial policies set into operation by the National Recovery Administration, the Convention declared, "have served further to enrich the capitalists by establishing fixed monopoly prices, speeding up trustification, and squeezing out the smaller capitalists and independent producers." The labor provisions of the N.R.A. were no more satisfactory to the Communists than were its factory codes.

The fixing of the so-called minimum wage, at below starvation levels, has turned out in reality to be a big effort to drive the maximum wage down to this point. The so-called guarantee of the right to organize and collective bargaining has turned out in reality to be the establishment of company unions. The last remaining rights of the workers they now propose to take away by establishing compulsory arbitration under the Wagner Bill, camouflaged as an attempt to guarantee workers' rights...

All these domestic policies are openly recognized as identical in their content with the measures of professed fascist governments...

Even in these late years, when a search for accommodation with social-democrats and political liberals was already underway, the Communists attempted to identify Roosevelt's policies with those of Fascism.

Neither the President nor his supporters are directly labeled fascists, however.⁵

One may wish to dismiss this sort of rhetoric by the Communists as typical of their naive recalcitrance to accept American realities, and listen only to the prescriptions for strategy which emanated from the Comintern. Yet, despite the sharpness of their language, the Communists' insistence that the New Deal was not only out to save capitalism, but to strengthen and favor monopoly as a means of doing so, was plausible. Many analysts now grant that Roosevelt and his policy makers saw strengthening corporate capital as the most reliable means for moving out of the Depression. "Even at their most blindly doctrinaire," so severe a set of critics as Howe and Coser write,

when they were attacking the NRA as 'fascist', the Communists did touch upon a reality: the trend exemplified in Roosevelt's early policy toward a 'liberal garrison state', a trend that could also be noticed in the partiality the NRA showed toward big as against small business.⁶

In a study published by Princeton University in 1966, Ellis Hawley, an economic historian, drew a similar conclusion about the Roosevelt administration. "The practical effects of the NRA," Hawley wrote, "...were to allow the erection, extension, and fortification of private monopolistic arrangements, particularly for groups that already possessed a fairly high degree of integration and monopoly power."⁷

Undeniably, the Communist opposition to Roosevelt in these years reflected Comintern language and direction. The Third International had chosen to depict the contemporary era as one of class against class, and to promulgate a policy which linked socialists

and progressives to fascism. It was a myopic and self-destructive vision. But, for all of that, the American Party's platform was logically and intellectually consistent with their stated policy of refusing to work for change within the framework of capitalism. The specific political demands made in the 1934 Manifesto, expressed, and were consciously tied into, what Communist practice termed a 'maximum program'.

The Communist Party declares that wages must be maintained, no matter what the consequence to capitalist profits.

The Communist Party declares that unemployment insurance must be provided at the expense of capitalist profits...

...all struggles for daily bread, for milk and children, against evictions, for unemployment relief and insurance, for wage increases, for the right to organize and strike, etc., are directly connected up with the question of the revolution...⁸

These are demands which are couched so as to reject any possible compromise with the capitalist order. In this sense, they may be understood as "radical".

The ideology and program of these years produced a set of tactics and organizational movements which led to a directly confrontationist politics. The dual unionism of the Trade Union Unity League, the slogans and demonstrations of the Unemployed Councils, the nationally organized Hunger Marches, and the commitment to organizing both black and white workers in the South were just some of the practical activities through which the Party attempted to precipitate conflict with capitalist institutions, and raise questions about the nature of the belief system by which those institutions were justified.

In the South, principled insistence on inter-racial organization brought them into conflict with some of the very people they were trying to organize. The issue surfaced, for example, as the Communists worked among the Harlan County coal miners. The Communists' National Miners' Union, one of the first of the TUUL organizations, had gone into Harlan after the United Mine Workers had abandoned it, unable, or unwilling, to deal with the terrible and bloody violence which a strike, there, had precipitated. Inevitably, Theodore Draper writes, the 'Negro question' arose. Should Negro miners eat in the same soup kitchens or sit at the same tables with the white miners? Draper quotes from a report which one of the NMU organizers, Frank Borich prepared for the Politburo.

We called a special meeting of 25 leading comrades to discuss this and I spoke for about an hour explaining in detail the position of the Party, and when I was through it was the Negro miners who were the first to speak against it. There were only 3 Negroes there and they all spoke against the Negroes and the whites eating in the same kitchen, and they spoke on the following grounds: that in the South there is a law which does not permit Negroes and whites to mix together in social affairs, and that the coal operators and armed forces will use this as a pretense to smash the strike, and we should not give them this opportunity...⁹

The Communist leadership, however, insisted. "It is fair to say," Draper comments, "that only the Communists in that period, in the heat of battle, would have taken such a firm stand on this issue."¹⁰

It was the stand of a principled radicalism. For how else could one teach the importance racial equality played in one's value system, if one did not live by it? That the Negro miners themselves opposed eating together with whites did not change the situation. For, as far as the Communists were concerned, the Negro workers came

out of the same repressive atmosphere as everyone else in the hills of Kentucky, and they, too, had to be challenged to assert their own dignity.

The dilemma, in all this, is that one cannot both act by one's radical values, and expect to win the immediate and material gains for which one is fighting. Some of the leading local union members sent North for training, Draper reports, "came back with tales of Communist godlessness and belief in equality for Negroes that made the best anti-Communist propaganda." Findley Donaldson, chairman of the local NMU and active member of the Holiness Church, was sent North to a training course in Chicago. On his return, he reported that he had seen Communists 'with great applause give honor to Soviet Russia' and had heard them teach that 'there is no God; no Jesus; no resurrection of the dead...' Indignantly, Donaldson condemned the Communists for misleading him and his friends, "as I fully believe in God and the United States."¹¹ One cannot exactly say that Donaldson was misled; one can ask, however, what the atheism of Marxian ideology had to do with the issues involved in the Harlan coal strike. Bringing white and black workers together was one thing; insisting, in the midst of a fundamentalist culture, that religion is the opium of the masses, quite another.

Again, it is easy to be critical of the Communists' radical stance in these years. Bert Cochran, for example, writes of 'the crudeness and excesses of Communist "third period" propagandizing'.¹² But, whatever the defeats suffered in those Southern organizing drives, and in the Harlan County strike, the Communists won both prestige, and a legitimate reputation for militancy. The suffering and exploitation

of the Kentucky miners became an issue in the public consciousness.

"If the Communists could not win a strike or build a union in Harlan,"

Cochran grants,

they had one considerable accomplishment to record, both for themselves and for the miners. The hunger and degradation in the Harlan mine country had been a condition of life for decades; so had the bare-faced police-state regimes in company-ridden towns. No one on the outside cared about it or paid any attention to it until the Communists broke down the walls of ignorance and inattention that had shielded the area.¹³

It was through such campaigns as those in Harlan County that the Communists were able to validate their radical credentials. Whatever membership the Communists recruited in the coal area of Harlan was quickly lost, Cochran comments, "but the troubadours and minstrels who told and retold the glories of the battle were instrumental in making many more converts to the Party and its auxiliaries in the metropolises of the North and West."¹⁴ One cannot get a people to want to overthrow capitalism unless one can first convince them of its depredations. In Communist theory, it is struggle and its direction, not victory or defeat in any particular case, which perform that educational function.

It was not only in relation to the South that the Communists engaged in organizing activities which brought people into sharp conflict with the existing order. Falling back upon the most varied sorts of programs and campaigns, they undertook to expose, as rigorously as they knew how, the economic injustices inflicted upon the nation by depression.

Beyond winning relief for some of the needy and making the country conscious of the national problem, the marches and demonstrations, the moving of furniture back into apartments whose tenants had been dispossessed, the countless sitdowns in relief offices and other so-called job actions were important in carving the image of Communists as intrepid fighters for the underdog...15

On the campuses, through the anti-eviction drives of the unemployed Councils, through vocal and consistent support for far-reaching social legislation, such as Unemployment Insurance and programs of public works, through attempts to organize industrial unions, the Communists fought to demonstrate that the hardships of the time could be traced directly back to the nature of capitalism itself.

If one is willing to accept the paradigm described in Chapter I as a working model of what, at a minimum, a radical program and politics will contain, then the ideology, program, and organizational movements projected by the Communist party in the first half of the nineteen-thirties may be identified as unambiguously radical. The same cannot be said, however, for the quality of its involvement around the ideas on which its practice was based. It continued to close itself off to any suggestions of its own fallibility. It disdained any attempt to grapple with people around fundamental conceptions, therefore. It also held onto its assumption that the Party was invested by history with some sort of conquering grace, and that exploited groups would inevitably come to accept its leadership. From this it followed that the quality of ideological struggle in the movement tended to sink to one of drudgery and manipulation. There was, in general, no spark to bring program to fire, no fuel for its spread among masses.

A socialist organization can take as militant a stance, lead as many dangerous strikes, and issue as many manifestoes as it wishes; unless it is trusted by the individuals and groups to which it is appealing, unless they have a sense of its openness and reliability, they will not accept its leadership on a consistent basis, or seriously consider adopting its philosophical point of view. They may agree with certain of its programatic demands, and attend a demonstration or walk a picket line or join a coalition in support; they may participate in a local campaign related to issues of immediate importance to them, and even sign up for a committee or two. But they will not identify with the larger purposes of the movement, and they will refuse to integrate themselves into its structures.

Extremist slogans and militant organizational direction have nothing to do with the quality or character attaching to the manner in which a radical movement uses and applies programatic elements. The effort to radicalize social understanding includes aspects of practice which demand sensitivity and insight--the ability to identify with what others are feeling and to respond flexibly to unanticipated situations. These are just the aspects of practice that a Stalinist movement discourages. The language, imagery, and purism of the American party's propaganda during the Third Period, whatever its radical substrata, did ignore the particularities of American working class culture, and was unsympathetic to the rhythms and concerns of American working class life.

Yet, this is not to say that all that went on within the American Communist party had a flat and derivative quality. There were differences between individuals in the Communist party just as

there are differences between individuals anywhere else. There were cross currents of autonomy, eddies of authentic human contact, all of which drew their energy from the socialist vision which had brought so many to the Party in the first place. Indeed, as the catastrophe of Hitler's rise to power became evident to Moscow, the Comintern withdrew into itself to seek a new world program, and left its national sections to their own devices for awhile. The consequence, in the American party, at least, was a new vitality to practice, and even, from those responsible for propaganda and agitation, a sense of experimentation. In the remainder of this chapter I will examine the shifts and contradictions to which the quality of struggle in the Party's practice was, over the course of these Third Period years, subject. Their trajectory cannot be meaningfully plotted apart from events which affected the world Communist movement, and from the responses these events generated in the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

- 2 -

The Comintern did not begin to reconsider the Third Period strategy until after Hitler acceded to the Chancellorship of Germany, at the end of January, 1933. But it is significant to note that, as early as the Spring of 1932, the organizing results occurring under Third Period guidance in the various national sections came under serious criticism. Complaints were not turned on the Third Period strategy itself, but on the way in which the local parties were carrying out the line. This manner of dealing with things, of course, was an old story.

Most disturbing to the Comintern was the high turnover in membership. In April, 1932, the Executive Committee of the International sent a letter to the Central Committees of all the national sections entitled 'On the State of Membership'. Turnover in the United States exceeded 100%. The Polish Communist party had grown by 107% since 1931 but, according to Jane Degras, "had made no gains among the industrial workers and few among the unemployed; the new recruits were mostly peasants." In Great Britain, from 1929 to 1931, the proportion of members in factory cells had fallen from 8.5% to 4.2%. In France, the Party was continually registering new members, but, the letter chided, total membership figures were in continual decline. "Close analysis," the Comintern informed its sections,

shows that in all countries the main reason for inadequate recruiting of factory workers lies not outside but within the party itself, in incorrect plans and methods of recruiting, and, above all, in the insufficient attention paid to questions of work in the factories, in the absence of the requisite bolshevist vigor in reorganizing all party work onto a factory basis.¹⁶

True to form, the Comintern refused to trace any responsibility for the difficulties of the time back to its own assumptions and directions. The problems were all described as resulting from poor effort or generally mistaken practice on the part of local memberships. There was, however, this difference. After pursuing and encouraging an adamant leftist policy for close to four years, the Comintern began to cite sectarianism as a major source of the Parties' failures to achieve their organizing goals. "A resolute struggle must be... waged against sectarian tendencies," the letter to the Central Com-

mittees warned, "against the fear of taking in new members, rejected on the most varied pretexts. Against those guilty of such bureaucratic formalism and sectarian narrow-mindedness the party must proceed with utmost vigor..."¹⁷ The masses were not joining with the Comintern and its sections even though the Sixth Comintern Theses had scientifically determined that the workers were objectively ready for revolutionary struggle. Clearly, the bases of the Parties' appeal had to be broadened.

The leadership of the local Communist organizations were blamed for not having perceived the necessity of coming into closer contact with greater numbers of industrial workers, and for having allowed themselves to fall into sectarian error. But no matter, for the moment, at whose door fault was placed for the Third Period flounderings. Of greater significance was the fact that a change in policy and mode of outreach was obviously underway.

The American party was singled out for special concern in regard to this matter of sectarianism. In April, 1932, the ECCI issued its special resolution dealing with the American party's efforts at labor organization, "Lessons of the Strike Struggles in the USA." This came out in direct response to the loss of a Communist-led coal strike, called by the Pittsburgh District of the National Miners' Union in the Spring of 1931. The NMU had been set up by the Party's trade-union arm in opposition to the United Mine Workers, headed by John L. Lewis. According to the Communists, the strike encompassed 40,000 miners in western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, and northern West Virginia. Theodore Draper, in his study of the NMU, does not dispute the claim. But the Communists held out too long, many of the

miners simply went back to work unconditionally, and, in the main, the companies which did yield went ahead and signed contracts, not with the Communists, but with Lewis, and with some of the independent AFL locals. These were deemed the lesser evil.¹⁸

The Executive Committee of the Comintern thought the American party's failure, here, to be of such significance, that it singled out the western Pennsylvania coal strike for criticism in a major resolution. It was clear, however, that the criticisms were aimed at the character of the Party's organizational work in general.

"There was no live connection between the strike committee and the broad masses of the strikers," the Resolution pointed out.

The leading Communist group had "failed to establish a properly functioning strike apparatus through the formation and development of broad cadres of strikers." It was therefore unable

to get a clear picture of the strike situation at every moment, to quickly react to all events, to establish a systematic and very close connection with the strikers... The strike committee did not guarantee this close contact because..., despite the democratic forms (elections, resolutions on all questions)...(it)...was mainly a democratic body in form only... important questions were very often decided upon a too narrow basis and delegates were only drawn in so as to 'confirm questions' or to 'demonstrate' the attitude of the strikers on some question or other...¹⁹

The document's criticisms, though frank and sharp, were made in comradely fashion. There were no polemics against particular groups or individuals. Purges were not in the offing, just changes in the way the Party had been relating to people in its organizational struggles. There was to be more authenticity, less manipulation.

Immediately following upon the appearance of the Comintern Resolution, the American party held its Fourteenth Plenum. The

slogan of the meeting was 'Towards Revolutionary Mass Work'. The Plenum signalled the start of a campaign to break down the isolation and sectarianism into which the Party had backed itself. In this sense it signalled, as well, the start of a profound effort by the Party to upgrade the quality of its involvement with industrial workers, with the unemployed, with Negroes, and, in general, with all those whom it identified as part of its desired constituency.

The keynote address of the Plenum emphasized the new shift. Our Party, the address declared, has not yet made the essential changes necessary for carrying out its chief immediate task.

This task is to overcome the isolation of the Party from the decisive masses of the American proletariat, to come before the masses as their vanguard...and to firmly root itself in the decisive industries by means of solid personal contacts with workers...20

The need for 'solid personal contacts with workers' became the resounding theme of party strategy and agitational literature for the next three years.

For months following the Fourteenth Plenum, and even unto the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Plenums, the editorial pages of the Daily Worker overflowed with articles by good Communist militants and organizers who wanted to participate in the discussions about 'mass work' and the importance of getting close to the workers. But they could not do it. Indeed, what is more striking in the great majority of these calls for concrete, vital relationships to non-Communist workers is how formal and mechanistic they are. Seldom do they break through the surface rituals of knowing how to find the right organizational task, or carry out the proper bureaucratic procedure. None discuss the possibility that it is ideological resis-

tance itself which is responsible for the workers' refusal to hold high the banners of the Party and join its trade-union sections.

The old determinist fallacy that the workers will automatically accept communist leadership if organization, consistency, and commitment are present, blocks any understanding that the problem might be the very character of the Party's ideological struggle. The revolutionary trade unions in the Ohio district are growing poorly, writes David Gordon, a week after the 14th Plenum Resolution has been published in the Worker. Why is this happening, and what can be done about it? The problem is not that there is an absence of agitation on the part of the shop nucleus, Gordon states. "Workers are urged to join the unions, are urged to organize and fight against wage cuts, etc., etc., etc." But something is missing.

...in this agitation there is insufficient definiteness... In this agitation there is lack of enthusiasm, which we always see present among workers when economic battles are actually in process. The big events impress and inspire us; the day to day grind is more of a burden than anything else... We know the importance of this daily work, but we don't feel and act as though it is very important.

This subjective reaction on the part of our membership is due to the fact that from the top we do not sufficiently assess the possibility of developing struggles, and do not provide the organizational means through which to conduct those struggles.

There it is. Find the right grievance or issue, organize an efficient campaign around it, and the workers' natural reservoir of radicalism will rush to seek its own level, flowing out into the political channels which the proletarian vanguard has, 'from the top,' neatly laid down and structured. Communist organizers in the shops need not be concerned with the character of such assumptions, or at this point in history, at least, with the extent to which their brothers and

sisters in the labor movement are ideologically prepared to mount a direct challenge to the capitalist system.

The cry in these articles is always for the concrete. But the concrete is never explained, just the forms through which the concrete is supposed to emerge.

A high pitch of enthusiasm must be awakened among our shop nuclei and shop workers. There must be constant, careful--but not so careful that it cannot be known to anyone--agitation carried on against conditions in the mills. Discussion among the workers must spread from individual, from department to department, against the common grievances...

The making of contacts, the visiting of contacts, the calling together of contacts in meetings in private homes, must develop rapidly... Not weeks and months, but only days must go by in which to call these contacts together. The meetings must involve above all the discussion of demands, the probability of developing struggle around these demands, and the manner in which to involve larger numbers in these demands.²¹

What Gordon describes here is excellent trade-union practice. One can sense the urgency and concern beneath his words. There is not the same crippling, mechanical reliance on bureaucratic solutions which is typical of so much Party writing. Yet the problem which the Party confronted was that the workers were resisting it ideologically. And when one gets to the details of what must happen on the level of broader theory, as cadres come into intimate contact with the lives of these workers, Gordon's analysis dissipates. Organize the workers, help them to fight for and achieve their economic demands, and they will come to Communism.

The only one of these discussions of the Fourteenth Plenum which seems to break out of the mold of focussing exclusively on economic organization is an article under the byline Lena Davis.

"When we speak of guidance," Lena Davis writes,

it should not be guidance in the sense of proper instruction, because every factory has different problems, different tasks. Our guidance should be through personal contact, personal help...22

Lena Davis no more engages in the formal issues surrounding the problem of how to struggle with workers ideologically than do any of the others who worked within the context of Stalinist political assumptions. But she moves to new ground: 'personal help'. There is an implication here that unless the Communist is perceived as friend and colleague, as well as union organizer and political leader, then all the living room meetings in the world will not enable his or her ideas to penetrate the consciousness of working people.

It is perhaps overly simply to be critical of the American Communist party for its self-undermining attempts, in these Third Period years, at humanizing and expanding its contacts with the working class. For, whatever the integrity and character of some of the individuals in leadership, they were incapable of visualizing the ways in which the basic givens of their own Party made it next to impossible for them to achieve the very goals they were assigned, and told to achieve. Recognition of that truth always meant a break with Communism. With such mechanical notions of how to reach out to people, the wonder is not that the Communists attracted proportionately few workers to their unions, unemployment councils, and political branches, but that they attracted any at all. One should not forget, however, that many of the best Communist organizers worked against the grain of Stalinist practice, not with it. There was always a Lena Davis somewhere who sensed that one of the keys to ideological change was not mere political agitation, but a knowledge on

people's part that they could count on the Communists in all areas of their lives; that helping to get a sick baby across town to a hospital clinic at 3 A.M. could do as much to teach about the nature of socialist values and relationships, as any number of well articulated political demands, and well-run trade union meetings.

Still, there was no significant change in the quality of the American party's practice until approximately another year had passed. This required, for its occurrence, the release of yet one more Comintern document, the "Statement on the German Situation and the United Front," which appeared in March, 1933.

The historical record is quite clear. From 1932 to 1935, whatever the inherent limitations to the process, the American Communists undertook consistently to loosen the rigid and mechanical quality of their methods for making contacts and winning adherents. The historical record is also clear that these shifts were not incremental, they did not build steadily over time. They occurred in two qualitative leaps, as it were, both leaps following upon the issuance of Comintern documents, one in 1932 and one in 1933. These documents themselves followed upon two critical events in German politics, first, the election of Hindenberg, and then, almost a year later, the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor.

I do not make these observations in order to downgrade or dismiss the political dynamics of the American party as mere sham, unthinking responses to instructions from Moscow. In their own terms, the American Communists were functioning out of an internationalist ideology and concept of organization which made sense to them, even if they refused to test and examine some of the theory's more ques-

tionable assumptions. Rather, I am insisting that one view the Party's behavior from within the perspective of its own intellectual framework. In that case, one cannot understand the transformation which did take place in the quality of struggle in the American Communist Party without seeing that change in context of, first, the world situation in general, and, secondly, the American party's own commitment to what it defined as correct revolutionary internationalism.

Shifts in Comintern policy were never accidental, not even the hesitant, groping ones. As one looks about the history of the time, searching for possible explanations for this beginning re-orientation, one comes upon Germany. One witnesses, in the pages of the Worker, as 1931 comes to an end, and the early months of 1932 begin to roll by, growing, and ever more frequent reports of bloody and violent clashes between the Nazis and the German Communists. In March, Hindenberg was elected President, and it was clear that the Weimar Republic was close to a collapse to the Right. Shortly thereafter, the Comintern put out a call to its sections to 'end sectarianism', and chided the American party for failing to come into 'close contact' with the workers. The Americans then held their Fourteenth Plenum, calling for the 'turn towards mass revolutionary work'. Later that Spring, the Third International worked with two French, left-wing intellectuals, Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland, to organize the first World Anti-Fascist Congress. Out of this meeting, held while the Third Period was still in its heyday, Hoover entrenched as President, and Hitler not yet Chancellor of Germany, came to the various, national based 'Leagues Against War and Fascism,' which evolved into some of the largest and most important organizations

of the Popular Front.

Officially, the Comintern showed no disarray in the face of Hindenberg's victory. In a way, the Worker's reporting on the German election reads like a good-news, bad-news vaudeville joke. First, the good news: "4,982,000 Vote Communist in Germany," reads the Worker headline. Down below, in the article itself, the bad news: Hindenburg won.²³

The statistics, which the Worker reported, but did not comment upon, were disastrous. True, the Communists received close to five million votes, 300,000 more than in the election previous. This increase to five million votes, according to Party analysis,

again gives witness to the inexorable forward movement of the forces of the proletarian revolution. The German working class slowly but surely is gathering its forces for the coming battles in which it will smash down the rule of fascist reaction being carried through by Bruening-Hindenburg, with the support of the social democracy.²⁴

What the article neglected to point out was that, if the Communists were 'slowly but surely' building their forces, the Nazis were 'rapidly but surely' building theirs. The Communist vote was five million. The Nazi vote was 11 million, over twice as many. The Communist increase was 300,000. The Nazi increase was 1,000,000, over three times as many. This information readers of the Worker were left to deduce for themselves. Meanwhile, the Comintern leadership began to experiment with changes in political direction.

If ever there were historical inevitability, it was demonstrated in Germany over the course of the following year. In January of 1933, Hindenberg appointed Hitler Chancellor; on February 27, the Reichstag was burnt down, and the Communists blamed; on February 28,

the aging and tired Hindenberg, representative of all German people, signed the Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of People and State, which made Hitler dictator. The decree announced the suspension of seven sections of the Constitution of the German Reich. It explicitly permitted "restrictions on personal liberty, on the right of free expression of opinion, including freedom of the press, on the right of assembly and association, and violations of the privacy of postal, telegraphic, and telphonic communications..."²⁵ The police began arresting every Communist in sight, and to track down those now in hiding.

Within a week, on March 5, 1933, the Executive Committee of the Comintern issued a "statement on the German Situation and the United Front". While a long road lay ahead to any sort of meaningful cooperation between Communist and Socialist organizations in opposition to Fascism, the search for the policy which eventuated in the Popular Front can be formally dated from the appearance of this document. It was published in the Daily Worker on March 18.

Before getting down to business, the Statement, first, squarely places blame on the Social-Democrats for the failure of all previous attempts at unity. "The chief obstacle to the formation of the united fighting front of communist and social-democratic workers," it reads, "was and remains the policy of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie pursued by the social-democratic parties which has now exposed the international proletariat to the blows of the class enemy." However, in view of the recent events in Germany, the ECCI declared, it was willing to give the Second International another chance; the ECCI was prepared to offer a positive, if cautious, response to a

February 17 statement issued by the Socialists "on the readiness of (their) affiliated social-democratic parties to form a united front with the communists to fight against fascist reaction in Germany."²⁶

The ECCI statement set out conditions which, if implemented, meant a fundamental break with the program of the Sixth Comintern Congress, and a loosening of the Third Period line.

Taking into consideration that, because of the practical fighting tasks confronting the working Class, arising from the varied conditions peculiar to each country, an agreement between the communist and social-democratic parties on defined actions against the bourgeoisie can be most successfully carried out within the individual countries, the ECCI recommends the communist parties of the individual countries to approach the central committees of the social-democratic parties...with proposals for joint action against the capitalist offensive and fascism.

The Comintern was granting to its member sections a certain amount of leeway reaching out to local social-democratic groups. It was also proposing to jettison both the united front from below, and the doctrine of social-fascism. If the communists in a particular area received what they felt were acceptable responses from the parties of the Second International, then they were "to refrain, for the period of the common struggle against capital and fascism, from attacks on social-democratic organizations." Conditions for co-operation with socialist leadership, though not to be established as formal doctrine for another two years, were open for tentative consideration.²⁷

As the Comintern leaders withdrew into their Moscow sanctuary, in order to develop a coherent policy for dealing with the rise of Fascism, local parties were left relatively to their own devices. In this interim period of 1933-1935, Howe and Coser write, the American party

...had occasionally to work out its politics and tactics independently... The results, while frequently contradictory in an amusing sort of way, were also comparatively sensible, and brought distinct gains to the party.²⁸

There was no immediate transformation of party policy on either national or international levels. 'Class against class' remained the defining slogan. At the same time the world party was under instructions to look for ways of allying with socialists, the British Communist R. Palme Dutt wrote Fascism and Social Revolution, published in June of 1934. This gave explicit theoretical formulation to the doctrine of social-fascism. In America, overtures were made towards the socialists, but in the pages of the Daily Worker, polemics against Norman Thomas appeared just as regularly as they ever did. The New Deal was still portrayed in party literature as fascist in inspiration.

Overall, however, despite the fact that they often tried to move in two directions at the same time, the Communists became relatively muted and reasonable in approaches to former ideological opponents on the left. The results made for a qualitative shift in the way the American party presented itself, and tried to reach out to people.

- 3 -

The changes wrought by the Comintern in March, were formally introduced into the American Party in July, at a special meeting of the leadership held in New York city, and referred to as the Extraordinary Party Conference. The new, intensive struggle for the United front which the conference had been organized to promote, Browder

told the meeting, "began with the manifesto of the Communist International, and the rise of fascism to power in Germany."²⁹ There was no problem with Browder's tracing the origin of this meeting back to the Comintern resolution. For the communists, to work openly within the political framework laid down by the International, was part of the legitimate business of revolution.

The Extraordinary Conference published an open letter to the membership which was, indeed, unusually frank in its public admissions of party weakness. The statistics exposed to the view of anyone who cared to read them were dismal. Only 4% of the membership were organized into factory nuclei, and only a small proportion of those were in the large industrial plants. The chief red trade unions in coal, in steel, in metal, in textiles, in marine, always the pride of the Party in its attempt to radicalize the American labor movement, were stagnating; the majority of strikes, during the preceding year, had been led by reformists. "In fact, the reformists in Eastern Ohio, a concentration district of the Party, succeeded in taking over the leadership of miners who had previously carried on an heroic strike under the leadership of the National Miners' Union." Gross blunders of the allegedly resolute and trustworthy vanguard were aired. We must "know enough to call off a strike at the proper moment if the mass of strikers are not able to carry the struggle further," the letter reported.

There must be no repetition of such cases as those in Warren, Kentucky, and Allentown, when, after the strike was lost, the Party and the revolutionary trade-unions left the workers to themselves, and failed to carry on any work whatsoever...

Furthermore, the circulation of the Daily Worker was dropping, and

the Party was having serious difficulty in attracting workers to its leadership core. Many workers had "come forward in recent struggles," the letter complained, but "the cadres of functionaries of the Party have not been rejuvenated and strengthened from the ranks of these workers..." The Party was unable to hold onto and develop adequate numbers of new militants.³⁰

Forced to rely upon their own resources, confused by the resistance of history to the direction laid down for it by Marx and Engels in the middle of the nineteenth century, puzzled by the failure of their own prescriptions to draw in the masses, communist leadership unwittingly fell back upon the one thing that would make it possible for them to play a slightly more influential role in American political life as heads of a radical social movement. They began, somewhat, to tell the truth about themselves.

Browder, in his speech to the Extraordinary Conference, again and again stressed the notion that an essential failing of the Party's organizational work was its mechanical quality. "Abstract, general plans, worked out from above, are mechanically applied to the life of each and every local organization."³¹ Browder recognized that, unless the rank and file sections felt free to develop, within the program of the Party, their own ideas, approaches, and styles of work, the Communists could never win for radicalism the competent leadership it had to have. "(I)t is necessary to make profound adjustments in the inner life of the Party," Browder told the conference.

It is necessary to shift the center of gravity of Party life to the concentration points down below... The sections must be developed to the point where they have more initiative, and more sense of responsibility and power.³²

With a sharpness seldom evident in the Party's earlier efforts to become a mass organization, Browder warned the comrades that they had to hear, on deeper levels, what other workers were saying, that they had to be less arrogant, that they had to temper their habits of bossing people around. The move to mass revolutionary work, he said, "requires an active and sympathetic contact with these workers down below...

The greatest weakness which we have in carrying through our united front policy is that our comrades carry over the very bad habits of commandeering workers, of not taking carefully into consideration all special organizational peculiarities and habits and traditions, of ordering about workers as soldiers in an army... this old commanding approach will not only hinder any progress among these workers, but even more, these workers will throw us out on our necks when we try to use these methods among them.³³

Browder, in this major address, was brushing upon themes which, if followed out, could finally bring to the surface of Communist action that underground, intra-party quality of people's concern for one another that, supposedly, defined the nature of socialist relationships.

Unfortunately, what Browder could not know, because his own particular ideological set prevented him from knowing it, was that the very attitudes and behavior patterns of which he was so critical, could never, within the frame of Stalinist political organization, be fundamentally altered. Even as Browder closed his speech, he fell back into the old Stalinist habits and ideas. The struggle for the united front, he took pains to point out, did not mean that the communists were about to become partners with the socialists, were about to grant legitimacy to any influence the social-democratic parties might have over the left. "The united front is not a peace

pact with the reformists," he reminded his audience. "The united front is a method of struggle against the reformists, against the social-fascists, for the possession of the masses...

Did you think we are making the united front with the Musteites because we have suddenly become convinced that they are good class-conscious fighters, good leaders of the working class? Have you forgotten that precisely the reason why we make the united front with them is because we have got to take their following away from them?³⁴

It is not that Browder believed reformists and liberals were stupid; it is just that no fully confirmed Stalinist could ever shake the conviction of his or her own absolute rightness. Nor does it hold that this new, confused groping towards a united front was simply a cynical ploy to entrap the reformist enemy. True cynics and accomplished manipulators would not have put into the public record their ultimate goal of wanting to destroy the very partners they sought. They would have circulated the news privately. In a sense, the Communists believed in themselves so strongly, they thought even the people they were out to undermine would, as history moved closer to the precipice of revolution, see the reasonableness in their own destruction.

Whatever the contradictions of the united front policy, it had a major impact on the Party's major educational and organizational tool: the Daily Worker. If the quality of struggle can be said to be reflected in an instrument so essential to practice, then it follows that the attitude and style of the cadres contacts with people will begin to soften, and show a more sensitive and human side.

Soon after the Extraordinary Conference, the Worker did indeed move towards a change in format. Its basic content was altered

in such a way as to become more accessible to those unwilling to make politics the sole priority of their lives. Features began to appear which could be found in any newspaper: a woman's column, news from Hollywood, a daily cartoon, a comic strip, a sports column. In planned and conscious fashion, the editors were trying to change the nature of the paper's appeal, so that more members of the American public might be willing to pick it up, and get exposed to its revolutionary content.

In many ways, the paper moved to enrich itself. It risked hiring and publishing people like Ed Newhouse. Prior to Newhouse, sports reporting in the Worker was limited to clean-cut proletarian events like gymnastics, swimming competitions, decathlons. Newhouse put all such staid and stereotyped sports 'coverage', such as it was, to shame. It was in these years, too, Al Richmond points out, that a young historian from Princeton, by the name of Theodore Draper, came on to work, as an assistant to the foreign affairs editor.³⁵ These were men of talent and insight.

The editors, and their political supervisors on the Ninth Floor, the floor above the Worker's offices, were seeking a significant change in quality, which, they hoped, would be reflected at all levels of party activism. On August 15, 1933, there appeared in the back pages of the radical paper a new column, In the Home. In look, it would have fit well into the feature section of any small, home-town American newspaper. The column had two departments. One provided recipes for thrifty, but nutritious meals. The other offered, each day, a new fashion pattern. The masthead showed, on one side, a demure proletarian housewife intently bent over a sewing machine;

on the other side she was pictured stirring pots on a stove. "It is wise to wear a slip," the first day's fashion column began, "not only in order that the dress itself may fit well, but because dresses don't get wrinkled quite so quickly and don't have to be pressed quite so often. Crepe or wash satin has been suggested for this one (and a lovely, long model it is) but we think it could be made up well in a cotton material..." Main courses suggested in the cooking department for that day were farina croquettes, veal loaf, and a Chinese omlette.³⁶

It is important to maintain a sense of perspective and humor as one goes through this material. Those responsible for leadership in the area of political education were trying to develop a style and orientation to which they felt a typical working class family could respond. Their approach, however, got them into trouble with some of their more revolutionary, class conscious readers. "We're Bawled Out," said a headline over a letter printed next to the homemaker's column one day. "Comrade editor," the letter began,

A workers' paper can present a woman's corner of real value to the wives of workmen. It should not be a poor imitation of the woman's page in the capitalist press, filled with bourgeois ideology... The function of the corner which makes its appeal to women, to housewives, is two-fold:

1. To aid them in their struggle against poverty.
2. To radicalize them.

And how did the writer fulfill his duty?

1. He submitted menus with fancy names to hide poverty.
2. He held up a bourgeois bloodless female in a stylish dress as a model to be copied.

It is interesting to examine the lunch, which is the main meal of the day.

The principle dish is a can of salmon deprived of the juice, which contains food value, the soft bones, which contain calcium, much needed for the building of teeth, and the skin, which also has fat and minerals. This emaciated canned salmon

is then dressed up with white sauce, which first has to be made, and bread crumbs, and then baked in an oven. The oven creates heat, and is expensive to run...

At this season fresh fish is much cheaper than canned fish by a half and more, and it is certainly more healthful. Cooked or broiled plainly with a lump of butter melted over it, it is less labor, cheaper, and more beneficial than escalloped salmon.

Today tomatoes are cheap. They are most beneficial to the health and should be eaten daily. Vegetables such as carrots and wax-beans are also at their lowest, lower than the fresh or canned lima beans which were recommended...

It should be the function of the writer...to make up menus of the cheapest current foods which will make a completely adequate diet, and not a minimum maintenance diet...³⁷

One might be tempted to scoff at all this Stalinist furor over a can of salmon, but, in fact, the writer of the letter knows her business, not only in terms of cost-effective nutrition, but in terms of the economics of energy use as well.

In the new feature columns which appeared in the Worker one can watch the editors strive to find some balance between the old, humorless Stalinism, and a new, lighter, more expansive approach to the problems of daily living. 'Dr. Luttinger Advises' tried particularly to straddle both these worlds. "What is the most characteristic physical trait of a Party worker?" the good doctor asked in one of his columns. It was certainly not color, race, size, or weight, he said. "No, we have comrades of all sizes and all colors, fat and lean, belonging to every nationality under the sun" What distinguished the typical Party worker, "besides the undeniably intellectual appearance," was, according to Dr. Luttinger, "a peculiar and an indefinite feeling of fatigue." Party workers simply did not get enough sleep!

Work during the day in the shop or office; Party, union or other organizational activities in the evening; reading literature and books and 'gabbing' late into the night...

Party members had to learn to organize their time better, and, most importantly, to hold shorter meetings.

There is no reason whatsoever why the meeting has to extend beyond 10 o'clock. And yet, in most units, the session is rarely adjourned before 11, 12, and in some instances, 1 o'clock. This not only prevents any other activity for the evening, but defeats its own purpose...38

Luttinger's column demonstrates the Party straining, with all that it knew, to operate on a level of common immediacy with the rank and file communist worker. That so much of what these efforts produced emerged as forced and pretentious, is a telling comment on the limits and nature of Stalinism.

Besides the comic strip, Little Lefty, which did not begin to run until October of 1934, one of the few areas where the paper was able to break through Stalinist barriers, was in the sports column introduced by Ed Newhouse. Newhouse's writing had a wit and sparkle unequalled anywhere else in the communist literature of the day. And besides that, he was not afraid to take on authority--the New York Yankees. Did Joe McCarthy, the Yankee manager, say that, what the team had lost in a week, it could get back in a week? "We were only a game behind a week ago tonight, and the big part of the Washington lead has been picked up since then. Why can't we win it back?" Why not? Newhouse asked rhetorically in his column.

Because Gomez, Rubling, and Allen can't finish games, Ruth, Coombs, Lazeri, and Gehrig are tired, and of the younger men, only Chapman, Dickey, and Van Atta are coming through with championship stuff.

Here was a radical journalist who knew how to write of truly essential things in the world of the workingman. He had a good eye when it

came to women's tennis as well, and an ear for the gentle parody of Stalinist cliches.

While golfing, baseball, and boxing run along their worn and well established grooves, tennis is the one major sport registering progressive tendencies. Two years ago Helen Willis Moody blazed the trail by appearing without stockings at Forest Hills, and last season Bunny Austin staked out his pioneer's claim by wearing shorts on court.

Although the Deliberating Body of the West Side Tennis Club deliberated mildly against the principle of shorts, mass pressure by lady players with presentable stems caused a reversal of decision

Miss Helen Jacobs, the femininely Amazonian defending champion, blushed and smiled graciously as she made her statement: 'I talked to mother over the long distance phone to the coast, and she said it would be all right, but of course I'll be a bit nervous as first. I think shorts look so nice. Don't you?'

Some might want to argue that Newhouse's appreciation of Helen Jacobs' legs was a form of male chauvanism; but it is hard to see ideological corruption in the acknowledgement that there are pretty women in the world.³⁹

In Newhouse's work one gets a glimpse of what a genuine, popular, American Marxist literature might have looked like. When Heywood Broun, writing for the New York World Telegram, expressed surprise in his column at the Worker's permitting such unorthodox prose, Newhouse responded with a column of his own.

Karl Marx, avers the former socialist candidate and musical impresario, would not approve. An investigation by the Central Committee is sanguinely predicted...

No, Comrade. There'll be no Central Committee investigations. And as for the solicitude about 'when a communist starts out on an enterprise without the support of texts from book and chapter, there is no telling what may happen to him' I'll take my chances.

Mr. Brown makes a mistake in basing his judgments on the physiques of the cafeteria 'Communists' he's accustomed to associate with. Hell, Marx and Liebknecht, I've heard, used to just polish up their control heaving bricks at policemen.⁴⁰

There may not have been any Central Committee investigations, but, while the Worker kept its new style and freshness of approach, the Newhouse byline disappeared sometime late in 1934. Newhouse went on to write for the New Yorker.⁴¹

It will not do to dismiss these back page efforts of the Daily Worker as irrelevant to the substance of the Party's political action, curiosities in the history of Stalinist politics. They are, I suggest, a particular and significant extension of what that politics, just prior to the Popular Front, was all about. The Comintern, unsure and confused about what to do in the face of Hitler's rise to power, and the destruction of German Communism, laid down a few general guidelines, then retreated into itself in order to develop a new direction for the world movement. Left alone for a few years, the leadership of the American Communist party was forced to search out its own strategies and ideas for making contact with the working class. The quality of action which resulted was a mesh between the old rigidity, which had set in over the Comintern parties during Stalin's struggle to assume full control of the movement, and the kind of flexibility, frankness, and unorthodoxy that, in his later years, at least, Lenin had insisted were essential to an effective radicalism. This mixture, which held the Party to its confrontational stance with capitalism, while allowing for greater frankness and experimentation in the struggle around ideas, brought the Party's practice into closer alignment with the paradigmatic notion of radical

politics that I have used as a theoretical base throughout this study.

I have attempted, in this chapter, to apply categories for the study of radical activism, developed in Part One, to the political practice of American Communism in the first half of the nineteen thirties. The Party, the framework leads me to conclude, was not deradicalized in these years. Its ideology was couched in revolutionary class against class terms, and its organizational program brought people into direct conflict with capitalist institutions. The quality of its ideological outreach, however, was, at least in the early thirties, rigid, and false to the rhythms of American working class life.

What began to give the Party credibility were its efforts, begun, at Comintern urging, in 1932, at transforming this quality of its ideological and political struggle. In the Spring of that year its attitude towards the social-democrats, for example, began to become more open, and its agitation, particularly in the pages of the Daily Worker, to become more flexible, and more subject to stylistic experimentation. No matter what the limitations upon it, the Party began to look for new ways to come into contact with, and influence, American workers. Its practice began to reflect, at all levels, a fuller and more consistent radical character.

In the closing chapters of this Part, I will look at the specific ideas, programs, and methods through which rank and file Party members carried their tasks of revolutionary organization into the shops and streets. What were their campaigns? Through what

sorts of structures did they carry them out? What did they do on a day to day basis? Why? What problems did they face? What was their understanding of the ways in which action and tangible practice would radicalize the consciousness of the people with whom they worked?

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

¹Daily Worker 25 January, 1932, p. 4

²Ibid., 22 May, 1933, p. 5; 3 June, 1933, p. 5

³Ibid., 10 June, 1933, p. 5

⁴Ibid., 12 January, 1932, p. 1

⁵"Manifesto of the Eighth Convention of the Communist Party of the USA" in Earl Browder, Communism in the United States (New York: International Publishers, 1935), p. 14

⁶Howe and Coser, p. 233

⁷Ellis W. Hawley, The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 479

⁸"Manifesto of the Eighth CPUSA Convention," pp. 15-16

⁹Theodore Draper, "Communists and Miners," Dissent 19 (Spring 1972): 386

¹⁰Ibid., p. 387

¹¹Ibid., p. 386

¹²Cochran, p. 55

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 56

¹⁵Ibid., p. 79

¹⁶The Communist International, vol. 3, p. 187

¹⁷Ibid., p. 189

¹⁸Draper, "Communists and Miners," p. 380

¹⁹"Lessons of the Strike Struggles in the U.S.A.," Resolution of the E.C.C.I. Communist XI (May, 1932): pp. 407-408

²⁰"The Tasks of the Communist Party of the USA," Resolution of the Fourteenth Central Committee Plenum Daily Worker 28 April, 1932, Special insert, p. 1

²¹Daily Worker 3 May, 1932, p. 4

²²Ibid., 17 May, 1932, p. 4

²³Ibid., 15 March, 1932, p. 1

²⁴Ibid., 16 March, 1932, p. 1

²⁵"Presidential Decree for the Protection of People and State, 28 February 1933," in Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945, introduced and edited by Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (New York: Viking Press, 1975), p. 174

²⁶The Communist International, vol. 3, p. 252

²⁷Ibid., p. 253

²⁸Howe and Coser, p. 230

²⁹Browder, "Why an Open Letter to the Party Membership," excerpts from the Report to the Extraordinary Party Conference, New York, 7 July 1933, in Communism in the United States, p. 124

³⁰"An Open Letter to the Party Membership," Daily Worker 13 January, 1933, p. 3

³¹Browder, "Why an Open Letter?" p. 121

³²Ibid., p. 137

³³Ibid., pp. 147-148

³⁴Ibid., p. 149. A. J. Muste was a Dutch born minister who had been active on the American Left since before W.W.I. A militant socialist, he had been one of the leaders of the Lawrence, Massachusetts textile strike in 1919. In 1921, he became dean of Brookwood Labor College, a haven, in those days, for independent radicals. He was also a pacifist, and in 1923 helped found the War Resisters League. In 1933 he founded the American Workers Party, an independent Marxist movement, which organized workers and set up unemployment councils. Muste's independence had always made him anathema to the Communists.

³⁵Richmond, p. 250

³⁶Daily Worker, 15 August, 1933, p. 4

³⁷Ibid., 18 August, 1933, p. 4

³⁸Ibid., 19 August, 1933, p. 4

³⁹Ibid., 16 August, 1933, p. 3

⁴⁰Ibid., 19 March, 1933, p. 3

⁴¹Richmond, p. 250

CHAPTER SIX

BEING RADICAL (1): IDEOLOGY AND PROGRAM

How does one go about making a revolution? In the last quarter of the twentieth century this question, when applied to the liberal, capitalist societies of the industrialized West, may have an odd ring to it. In many of these nations, even where socialist parties are in power, there is difficulty enough just keeping intact the welfare state policies and trade union influence of the past fifty years. Yet the question continues to be raised by those dissatisfied with the workings of a capitalist order; and it certainly was a real enough one for the American Communists in the 1930's.

The Communists wanted to know how to change society. When it came to grand theoretical pronouncements, and the political movement of great masses, they believed they had all the answers. On the local level, however, when they had to translate these pronouncements into principles which could guide them in the daily work of face to face contact, they were less sure-footed. For here they were forced to think about and encounter the sorts of problems endemic to all forms of community action. They experimented, testing different ways of reaching out to dispossessed workers and searching for generalized methods by which they could convince people of the reliability of

Communist practice, and the validity of Communist ideas. In consequence, whatever errors the Communists made in trying to lead strikes by the early thirties, and however crippled they were in their grounding in the rigidities of Comintern doctrine, in the field of community action for social change, they built a repository of knowledge and experience which still remains untapped.

This and the following chapter will examine the different levels of practice, so to speak, through which the Communists attempted to elevate local and particularized activity, into a component part of world-historical revolution. The most comprehensive level of practice, in this hierarchy of the methods of struggle, loosely corresponds to the over-arching, ideological framework of the movement. The next level is composed of the specific campaigns, programs, and organizational forms by which ideology, allegedly, is to be given historical substance and force. The third level encompasses the elemental, day to day involvements with people that make up and define the quality of struggle in its most immediately felt mode.

The introductory section of this chapter will briefly survey the nature and content of each of these levels. The remaining sections will explore in some detail the ideological and programmatic aspects of practice during the Third Period. Chapter VI will look at the character of day to day practice in these years.

The broadest level of practice turned on the ideological direction and over-all strategic perspectives set down for local Communist parties by the Third International. "Class against class," set the ideological tone of the Third Period, for example. "Unity against

fascism," described the ideological parameters of the Popular Front.

It was the responsibility of the national sections to propagate the general line by developing programs and structures of action specific to prevailing political conditions in their respective societies. This was always done under the direction of the Comintern. The most important mobilization forms brought out by the American Communist party, in the early 1930's, were the Trade Union Unity League, an industrially based labor organization designed to compete with the exclusionary, craft-oriented A.F. of L., and the Unemployment Councils. In addition, the Party maintained opposition groups within as many as possible of the unions to which they had access.

The Party's organizational movements overlapped the first and second levels of practice. For they both expressed the general ideological line, and had the function of carrying out what the Party called the political tasks of the moment. These referred to the actions, drives, and campaigns developed by leadership to transmute ideological framework into social force and mass pressure. There were, for example, the attempts to organize a sharecroppers' union in the South, as well as a Communist led strike of Mexican field workers in the Imperial Valley in California.¹ There were nation-wide demonstrations: May Day rallies, the massive Unemployment Day marches of March 6, 1930, the less successful Hunger March on Washington in December, 1931. There were the never-ending campaigns, on both national and local levels, for social insurance, better home relief, free milk for children of the unemployed. There was the constant agitation among both white and Negro workers to get them to become part of groups and protests against discrimination in hiring, Jim Crow, lynching

the trial of the Scottsboro boys, and the imprisonment of Angelo Herndon.

Some may wish to complain that all this activity was carried out in a manner alien to the spirit and realities of American politics, inherently disruptive in aim, and developed in terms of a hidden and manipulative agenda decided upon in Moscow. But even if such a narrow and simplisitic interpretation were indeed the case, the fact remains that the Communists, as few in number as they were, and as unsuccessful in their attempts to radicalize American politics, engaged in a tremendously broad field of social struggle.

American workers may not have joined the T.U.U.L., or given support to revolutionary unionism. But on street corners and at factory gates, they heard the slogan 'organize the unorganized', which the Communists took over from the collapsed I.W.W. and made their own years before almost anyone else in the post-War labor movement. American workers may not have fully trusted the Unemployment Councils. But they came to the hunger marches and anti-eviction drives, and joined the demonstrations against unemployment. They heard agitation for national, employer supported unemployment insurance at a time when even Robert F. Wagner was uncomfortable with the idea.² And, as the Communists posed alternatives to craft-unionism, fought to shift responsibility for economic hardship to the state, and proposed socialism and class struggle as solutions to the vast, cyclic dislocations associated with capitalism, they helped broaden the growing conviction that social arrangements did not have to stay as they were, and could be re-ordered through conscious human action. In this sense, the Communists were an integral part of those events and processes which, in the

depression years of greatest demoralization and despair, were preparing ground for the great union battles, and political fights for social reform, to come.

Most of the histories and analyses of the American Communist party focus on the above aspects of its practice: its ideological line and its strategic demands and structures on the one hand, and its general political activities and tasks, carried out through the structures to further the line, on the other. But there is yet a third aspect, which while acknowledged in most historical recountings, is often conceptually downplayed. The 'Jimmy Higgins' work the Communists used to call it, the simple, grinding, aggravating tasks of making phone calls, or knocking on doors, or handing out leaflets, or waiting week after week on an assembly line making acquaintances, and looking for some issue or other to come up, expecting that, sooner or later, one was bound to break. It was minute and boring activity; but it was what made revolutionary practice possible. For it was a first principle among the Communists that one could not change people unless one were in their midst, speaking their language, knowing their daily concerns, living their problems, ready to give leadership to their battles.

Few have attempted a rigorous conceptual analysis of what the Communists plainly and simply did in their day to day involvements with people. Leading a miners' strike could be dramatic and even, at moments, impinge on the historically tragic. But how does one write a leaflet? How do you get people out to a meeting? What kinds of demands should an unemployed council put before its local relief office? How does one get non-Party workers involved in, and stimulated

by, the process of actually drawing up the content of those demands?

The Communists wanted to transform social consciousness, and make it radical. This required, from their point of view, disciplined, ideological co-ordination and direction from a world revolutionary Party, and pointed national drives and campaigns around issues of fundamental importance in the lives of working people. But it also meant knowing how to motivate the disaffected into thinking about the importance of political action, attracting them first, perhaps, to open-air meetings, and then to closed gatherings in which problems on the job would be discussed, and ways of dealing with them proposed. It meant a conscious use of self, and a procession of intimate, direct, and personal social interventions that could build not only to shop floor actions, or angry confrontations with local relief administrators, but to a gradual re-ordering of the ideas which people had about the possibilities of the social bond itself.

This was hard, painstaking, demanding, and often fruitless work. But for most of the cadres of the Communist party, it was, at least up until the later years of the Popular Front, what 'being radical' was all about. "Whatever illusions I might have had about how easy it would be to organize auto workers were quickly dashed," Steve Nelson writes of his years as a Communist organizer in Detroit in the late twenties.

Most difficult to combat was the prevailing notion that "You can't build a union in Ford or anywhere else.' It was necessary to make people understand that it was possible... For proof you had to reach for the unimaginable; that, for example, the Czar was in power once, and he was overthrown.3

That was the argument Nelson used with the foreign born. To convince the American workers, he and his comrades relied upon the experiences of unions in other industries and sections of the country. "We put out bulletins, and whenever a group of workers like the New York needle trades workers won a strike, we publicized the outcome, or brought someone to Detroit to talk it up."⁴ If little is known of the specifics of the face to face work the Communists did in their shops and neighborhoods, it is not because the information is unavailable, but because almost no attempts have been made to bring it together in a systematic fashion.

I cannot, in the space of this study, give to each of these levels of Communist practice the full scope they demand. I can, however, survey some of their basic components over given periods. In the remainder of this chapter I will first take a closer look at some of the strategies, goals, and institutional forms organized by the Party in the first half of the nineteen thirties. Then I will discuss the major campaigns and political undertakings of the time, showing how these were tied into the larger defining goals and structures. In the next chapter, I will explore in some detail the mechanisms of particularized militancy and elemental action which, according to Leninist theory, were essential in transmitting to the overarching political structures of the revolutionary struggle, whatever energy and historical viability the these latter possessed.

- 2 -

To discover the major programmatic concepts, organizing structures, and political tasks which gave shape and direction to

the American party's activities during the Third Period, it is helpful to turn to three documents of the era. The first is the draft program of the Trade Union Unity League, the second, the pamphlet 'Fight, Don't Starve,' describing the aims and programs of the Unemployed Councils, and the third, Earl Browder's address to the 12th Plenum of the American Central Committee, delivered in November, 1930. These writings explicitly lay out what the Communists hoped to achieve in these years, and how they expected to go about achieving it.

The Trade Union Unity League formally came into existence in Cleveland, Ohio, on August 3rd, 1929, at a conference called by its predecessor in the labor movement, the Trade Union Education League. To appreciate fully the character and structure of the former, it is important to know something of the organization out of which it was established.

The Trade Union Education League was set up by William Z. Foster, and other radical trade-unionists from the Chicago area, in November, 1920. Its objective, wrote David Saposs in a 1926 study of union militancy, "was to unify all non-conformist elements in the labor movement, in order to reform it from the inside. The salient issue was amalgamation or structural changes in unionism in accordance with industrial development."⁵ Saposs, a scholar at the Brookwood Labor College at the time, was attempting to be as objective as possible in dealing with the goals and politics of

the American Communists.

Foster established the T.U.E.L. after strike and organizing campaigns in the steel and meatpacking industries had resulted in disaster. These campaigns, he wrote in later years, taught the Chicago radicals two important lessons.

The first was that our policy of working within the conservative unions was fundamentally correct... The second...was that we had to have a left-wing group, an organized militant minority. The loose united front we had made with the progressive elements, while correct in principle, was not enough. In both campaigns the lack of a strong left-wing organization had been a disastrous handicap to us...

So Foster, Jack Johnstone, Joseph Manley, and "some other Chicago militants," a "group of a couple of dozen members," launched the new organizations.⁶

Foster was soon travelling to Moscow to attend the first Congress of the Red International of Trade Unions, or Profintern, held in July, 1921. Once he discovered that the Russians supported that faction of the American party which rejected dual unionism, Foster decided to affiliate the T.U.E.L. with the Comintern. Not only did the International's direction accord with Foster's own ideological convictions, it provided an organizational base for quickly expanding the influence of the T.U.E.L., and establishing its legitimacy among radical militants in the United States. "Here at one stroke," Saposs wrote, "would be corralled the thousands of defectionists from the socialist and I.W.W. ranks." In 1922, the T.U.E.L. joined the Third International.

This step meant linking the trade union activities with the political movement of the Communists. Thus, to the program of amalgamation was added the demand that unions declare for affiliation with the red international and for independent political action... With the loss in membership and change in tactics of the socialists, the Communists became, by 1922, the aggressive left-wing opposition within the unions.⁷

By 1925, in consequence of its split with the Farmer-Labor party, the discomfort of many progressives with what they considered abrasive language and tactics, and the success of the A.F.L. in expelling many T.U.E.L. leaders, the organization found itself more and more circumscribed.

Even Foster, reviewing the history of the T.U.E.L. from the vantage of 1936, had to agree that its impact was diminished during the Coolidge years. "The T.U.E.L. found itself in relative isolation from the masses in this period," he wrote.⁸ Saposs, writing in the historical midst of things, was more specific. "Communism had become anathema in the labor movement," he asserted in his 1926 monograph. The 'opportunistic radicals', as Saposs called the Socialists, could not be expected to support an organization "endorsing principles diametrically opposed to theirs." Progressives, "who believe merely in liberalizing the labor movement,

...felt it inexpedient to remain attached to a movement that the American Federation of Labor and the American public in general regarded as its bitterest... foe. Gradually...the oppositionist radicals and the progressives discontinued their interest in the Trade Union Educational League.

Expulsions were rampant wherever the Communist presence was felt.

"The struggle is tensest in the needle-trades unions," Saposs recorded. Communists were expelled from the United Mine Workers, the

Carpenters, the Machinists. "Never before in the history of the labor movement has there been such a wholesale expulsion of members."⁹

The T.U.E.L., while finding it almost impossible to retain a significant foothold within the A.F.L., was not inactive during these years. In spite of its general isolation, it kept a small, but militant following in the mining, textile, and needle-trades, and played a key role in the job actions, organizing drives, and nationally prominent strikes which did occur in those industries in the mid and late twenties. In 1926, after more than a year of what was literally a civil war between left and right factions in the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, the T.U.E.L. led a successful strike among New York furriers, and was able to assume control of their International. In July, 1926, the New York joint board of the I.L.G.W.U., controlled by the left wing, called for a strike, and the garment center shut down. Somewhere between thirty-five and forty thousand cloak and dressmakers walked off the job.

The T.U.E.L. also led the bitter and violent textile strikes in Passaic, New Jersey, in 1926, and in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1928. It participated actively in the doomed and scattered strikes which occurred in the bituminous coal fields, in 1927 and 1928.¹⁰

Not even William Z. Foster contests the historical consensus that, other than in the fur industry, the Communist led strikes of the late twenties all ended in defeat. The Passaic strike, however, he insists was only a partial defeat, since the Botany Mills "capitulated to the union by restoring the wage cut, agreeing not to discriminate against union members, and recognizing grievance committees." Still, he grants, the strike "produced little tangible results in

organization," for the union was "unable to follow up with a vigorous campaign for organization and against blacklisting."¹¹

What Foster really means, it would seem, is that, once the workers were back in the Patterson mills, exhausted from a bitterly fought strike of almost a year's duration, the employers cancelled their concessions. And there was nothing which the T.U.E.L. United Front Committee, or the leadership of the United Textile Workers, to whom the Communists had been forced to give over the strike, could do about it. Nevertheless, it is only fair to point out that, among historians of American labor, there is a general consensus that, in the 1920's, no one could have successfully organized the American working class, and that almost any major drives or strikes were bound to fail. The Communists took pride in the 1926 Patterson strike, therefore, because it was the first mass strike in the United States which they had led on their own. This despite the fact that, although they had started it, they were unable to finish it.

Bert Cochran, generalizing from the Patterson strike, found the Communist union groups to be bureaucratic, doctrinaire, and 'obsessed with the need to politicize every conflict'. There is some justice in these criticisms, but Cochran is fair enough to point something else out in regard to the Patterson strike. "The Communists showed that they could conduct a big strike under difficult, virtually hopeless conditions," he states,

that they could operate effectively the complicated machinery of mass picket lines, soup kitchens, legal defense, national publicity strike meetings, and financial solicitation. In the straitened circumstances then prevailing, they were the ones both willing and able to step to the forefront to assume the responsibility and the risk...¹²

Here, Cochran recognizes those qualities which, in spite of everything else, allowed the Communists to play so visible and persistent a role in the American labor movement during the inter-war period.

In the early winter months of 1928, the Ninth Plenum of the Comintern indicated that a leftward shift in line, which would soon be introduced as the Third Period, was coming. At the Plenum, the head of the Red International of Trade Unions, A. Lozovsky, attacked the American party's strategy of working within the A.F.L. In March, the Fourth Congress of the Profintern ordered the Trade Union Educational League to reverse its priorities, sever its ties with Lewis' mine union, and seek to establish separate, industrially based unions wherever there were large numbers of unorganized workers.¹³

By September, the Communists had formally set up new industrial unions in mining and textile. By January, 1929, basing themselves on their following in the New York needle trades, they had set up the Needle Trades Industrial Workers' Union. Over the course of the year, the Automobile Workers Union of Detroit aligned itself with the Communists. And the Independent Shoe Workers', Amalgamated Food Workers', and Marine Workers' Industrial Unions, all situated in New York, were started.

On August 31, in Cleveland, the Communists held the fourth and final conference of the T.U.E.L., and brought into being the Trade Union Unity League. There were 690 delegates to the convention. According to John Williamson, one of the organizers, over 300 of the delegates were from the new, industrial unions in the mining, textile, and needle trades, 159 were from left-wing groups in the AFL, 107

from unorganized industries, such as steel, auto, rubber, maritime, and electrical appliances, and 18 from AFL locals. Howe and Coser write that close to 40% of the people in attendance were Communist party and T.U.E.L. officials, and thus hardly representative of the labor movement as a whole.

By 1933, five more branches of the T.U.U.L. had been formed: the Steel and Metal Workers Industrial Union, based in Pittsburgh, the National Railroad Workers Industrial League, in Chicago, the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, out of Seattle, and the Building and Construction Workers Industrial League, and the Office Workers Union, whose headquarters were in New York City.¹⁴

Most students of American labor history agree that the T.U.U.L. was no more successful than its predecessor organization at reaching the American working class. Excepting the furrier element in the needle-trades, writes Irving Bernstein, membership in the T.U.U.L. unions "was either insignificant or evanescent: most of them proved to be little more than paper formations." Howe and Coser contemptuously dismiss the T.U.U.L. as "...a puny hot-house product..."¹⁵

Even Foster, whose major responsibility in the Party was to head the T.U.U.L., acknowledged its limits. "The T.U.U.L. unions... did not succeed in building up organizations numerically," Foster wrote in 1936, some two years after the League had been dissolved. In the earlier stages of its work, Foster explained, it "developed a number of sectarian weaknesses which injured its general efficiency." These included tendencies "to develop its union programs upon too advanced a militant basis, and to identify the organization too closely with the Communist party." It also included tendencies "in the direc-

tion of dual unionism," which led the League to "neglect the work in the old unions, to concentrate on the new unions, and to establish new unions in some cases when it would have been more practical to have worked inside the A.F.L."¹⁶ The Communists had a knack for being frank about such gross shortsightedness, just so long as the line had already been altered by the Comintern, and it was years too late to do anything to correct past mistakes.

Still, there is a paradox attached to the history of American Communism. If the Communists were so consistently out of touch with American realities, why was there such a prevailing sense of their presence in the labor movement, and on the political left in general? If they were such an obscure sect, why does it take so many pages, so many volumes, so much discussion to re-affirm their insignificance? Why did John L. Lewis pick upon them, people once his mortal enemies, for leadership positions in what he knew would be one of labor's most demanding and violent organizational battles? Why didn't they just shrivel up from lack of support?

The accomplishments of American Communism in the labor movement cannot be assessed merely in the stark, material terms of strikes won, or unions established, or membership books retained. One must descend into the smaller social capillaries, into factory shops, neighborhoods of the working poor, offices off dark hallways in broken down buildings, if one is to understand how the Communists garnered tentative support, and exercised an influence far out of proportion of their actual numbers.

James Green described how the process worked in and around Detroit auto factories in the late twenties, where Communists were

active participants in most of the 'quickie strikes' that broke out. About three hundred Workers' Party members formed 'shop nuclei' in about a dozen shops, Green reported. They distributed provocative and pointed newspapers, denouncing Fordism as fascism, attacking racism, challenging trade-union capitalism.

Steve Nelson was one of the Communists in those shops. "Perhaps the Party's most important contribution during these years, and certainly the activity that sustained us, was the publication of almost a dozen shop papers in the auto plants," he wrote in his autobiography.

Called the Ford Worker, the Fisher Body Worker, and so on, these papers were agitational and educational vehicles for talking about unionism and socialism and making the connections between what was happening on the shop floor and the larger picture... The shop papers covered hazards in a certain department or lambasted a particularly unpleasant foreman... Workers craved to know what was happening in their shops--that the metal polishers had shut down their department and won an increase in the rates, or that a cut had been prevented by shutting down the conveyor on the night shift, or that Sam Phillips, the pusher, had been put in his place when he got on the men's backs...

Sections of Party auto workers put out these bulletins. We'd meet and have a freewheeling discussion about what should go into the paper. Who's going to talk to someone from the finishing department to get the lowdown on their beefs? Who's going to write it up?... I fit into this almost unconsciously. I was working on a bulletin, and though I wasn't much of a writer, I knew that we should get a story from this guy and that guy. I passed many an evening in a worker's home, getting the scoop on conditions in his shop for the paper, finding out what he thought of our efforts. I was becoming an organizer without even knowing it...

The resources of the entire Party organization, limited as they were, went into the papers. Even Party members who didn't work in the plants helped out. We had a multigraph machine in the office,

and every night a crew of young people were there operating it, setting up type, and collating the papers... Distribution was a touchy matter. To be seen publicly with the paper meant a quick firing...l?

Whatever else, the Communists made themselves known as committed organizers, who were prepared to take risks. One did not have to agree with the revolutionary slogans these people were always putting out, or even trust them too far beyond an immediate campaign, to grant that, when it came to a job action or a strike, it might not be a bad idea to have them on the picket line.

The point is that, without achieving their goal of radicalization, the Communists were nevertheless able to establish a presence in the social and political lives of the workers around them. Their activism extended well beyond shop floors and plant gates. For they could be effective in winning a hearing for their ideas, and respect for their leadership, they believed, only if they were felt to be an integral part of community life as well. They organized, therefore, within the ethnic clubs and benefit societies of Detroit immigrant neighborhoods. "This community organizing took place outside the arena of corporate control," James Green writes, "and proved invaluable to Communist organizers when industrial unionism revived as a socialist movement."

Worker resistance was often lodged in informal work groups on the shop floor, and in the ethnic societies. These were impervious to corporate domination, since one of their basic functions was to serve as a bulwark against the bosses. The Communists knew first hand the reality of these groups, and became part of them. "By patiently organizing at the shop-floor and community levels, they

were able to expand beyond the old Jewish-Finnish immigrant networks and reach new groups, notably native born blacks and whites."¹⁸

These are areas of contact and influence not revealed by examination of the formal surface of Communist practice. They help explain the Party's continuity, and its constant re-appearance at points of labor struggle, despite its inability to win workers to its full political line, and to its official membership structures.

What I want to suggest is that, in the industrial areas, whose political significance was growing with post-war urbanization, the revolutionary programs of the T.U.U.L., the National Unemployment Councils, and the Party itself, helped accustom American workers to active alternatives in the area of social policy. The slogans themselves did not have to be accepted in order to give strength and support to the notion that existing conditions could be changed, and seen as other than eternal verities.

Through immersion in informal work and social groups, through gripe-sessions on street corners, through leaflets and shop bulletins, through speakers at factory gates, the Party communicated its ideology and its proposals for reform to workers in the major industrial centers. It is for this reason the formal programmatic documents of the T.U.U.L. and the Unemployment Councils are so important: not because the workers read them, but because the communist organizers used the content of this literature as the basis of the militant notions which they introduced into the general talk of things.

The broad ideological formulations, and specific political and economic demands laid out in official statements and pamphlets, became the setting through which elemental street and shop activity

could be transformed into radical practice. One did not quote from such documents directly. One translated their content into ideas, language, and issues to which neighbors and fellow-workers could react. One did not hide the revolutionary stance of these platforms--indeed, one could not, since it was visibly implanted on the TUUL membership card--but tried to make it real and immediate. One built towards larger social concepts and political programs from the particular grievances and close, deeply-felt injustice of the time.

From the onset of the Third Period in 1928, to its demise towards the end of 1934, the philosophy and platforms of the T.U.U.L. were the primary source of ideological direction for Communist organizers. They expressed the key notions of radical theory in rawest form. "The new unionism bases itself upon the experience of class struggle," read the Draft Program.

Its slogan is 'class against class'. It realizes that the interest of the workers are completely in opposition to those of the capitalists, and that an irreconcilable conflict goes on between the working class and the capitalist class...

TUUL unions were not only instruments for economic struggle, but for ideological struggle as well. "They systematically carry on a work of education of their general membership as to the real meaning of capitalism, and the struggle of the workers to abolish it." The League was part of the world revolutionary movement. It is "international in character," the Program stated, and "joins with all the militant labor movements of the world under the banner of the Red International of Labor Unions." Finally, the Draft Program made no bones about the TUUL's long-range purpose. "The new unionism sets itself a revolutionary goal," the Program announced.

...It advocates that only by overthrow of the present system of capitalist ownership and exploitation and the establishment of a working class society in which production will be carried on not for private profit, but for the public good--can the workers improve their conditions and emancipate themselves.

The TUUL Draft Program made clear the radical character of the Party's ideological framework in these years.¹⁹

If the TUUL unions and the Communist party had only issued calls for revolution, and kept going on about the fundamental opposition of capital and labor, then the case for their role in helping foster the progressive consciousness of the 1930's would be a severely limited one. But Communist practice consistently sought to tie revolutionary goals and concepts to immediate organizational tasks. Thus, they introduced an ideological background which was far removed from what the American working class was prepared to accept. But from this background they drew slogans, campaigns, and ideas about the capitalist workplace around which specific shop, neighborhood, and national organizing activity could take place.

The TUUL program made central to its day to day functioning four action-oriented themes. The first was that of the importance of industrial unionism, and a working class united across racial and ethnic lines. The second, related to the first, was that of organizing the unorganized. The third was planned resistance to capitalist rationalization, which the Communists defined as the attempt by employers to extract increased surplus value at the point of production. The fourth, seen as coming under the drive against rationalization, was the call for social insurance.

First and foremost came the commitment to industrial unionism.

This was inextricably tied to attacks upon the craft principle of organization.

Craft unionism, born in the early stages of capitalism is at best helpless as a fighting movement in these days of monopoly capitalist organization. It must be superseded by an all-inclusive industrial unionism...

Closely related to this fight for industrial unionism was the effort to organize the unorganized, a slogan which was not to become a part of the American labor movement as a whole, until sometime during 1934.

...The old TUEL placed the main stress upon work within the conservative trade-unions. The new Trade Union Unity League puts the principal emphasis upon the organization of the unorganized workers into industrial unions, independent of the AFL...

The TUUL, it should be pointed out, attached its call for industrial unionism to a direct assault upon AFL leadership, to be carried on from without where possible, from within where necessary. The League, the Program read,

...does not advise the workers to join the reformist unions except in those industries where these organizations are solidly entrenched and where such a course is necessary for them to work in the industry. And this the TUUL does only on the basis of organizing these workers into the old unions for struggle against the dictatorial bureaucrats...20

The bravado and arrogance of such rhetoric, a simple and unreflective extension of the Comintern's new line, was one of many facets that kept American workers away from the red unions. At the same time, however, in shop papers, on street corners, at factory gates, the Communists were making industrial unionism and organization of the unorganized familiar concepts.

There were still two more sets of practical demands which

the Communists introduced through the TUUL, specific economic and legislative calls. One was built around the "fight against capitalist rationalization". The other, derived from the preceding concept, suggested that the United States catch up with the rest of the industrial world, and introduce social insurance.

The demands for resisting rationalization were worked out by the Red International of Trade Unions at its Fourth Congress, the convocation that had foreshadowed the Third Period. The purpose of the program was to prevent employers from intensifying the labor effort, and thus heightening their profits at the expense of the worker. The methods most often used by employers to raise profits in this way were speed-ups, tighter discipline on the assembly line, extended hours of work with no additions in pay, direct wage cuts.

The list of demands opposing rationalization spoke to those who knew directly the experience of being a production worker. These issues were formulated in such a way as to relate the idea of political struggle to immediate problems at the work place; they were offered as conceptual tools for sparking the gap between grievances on the line, and the beginning development of class consciousness. In their design, they tapped the sense of entrapment and exploitation that many workers felt to be an inherent part of the labor process, but about which they were often inchoate.

The anti-rationalization program called for the 7 hour day with no reductions in pay--the 6 hour day for miners and other underground workers. It called for the rejection of overtime work, thus opening up the possibility for greater numbers of people to be employed. It insisted upon early closings before Sundays and holidays,

and annual two week vacations, with pay. "Where piece-rates are in force it is necessary to ask for guaranteed minimum wages," the program stated. It insisted upon a minimum weekly wage of \$35.00 for all workers.

In line with its attack on the speed-up, the TUUL program urged workers to fight "arbitrary regulation of the pace of conveyors." It told them to introduce rest pauses, to claim the right to change the place of work, and to "struggle against the stop-watch system." In addition it demanded that workers not be dismissed except by consent of a factory council or union local; that there be equal pay for equal work for women and youth; that pregnant women and nursing be prohibited from assignment to "hard and unhealthy work".²¹

Finally, as part of its general campaign against rationalization, the TUUL called for a system of social legislation to be passed in the United States. This included demands for the shorter work week, elimination of child labor, protection for women employees, and health and safety standards. Crucial to this legislative package, was the demand for social insurance, "State insurance against unemployment, sickness, accidents, old age, etc." The Communist program insisted that these social welfare benefits

be paid for entirely by the employers and built upon the principle of complete self-management by the insured without any participation by the capitalists, or by the State in the management of the insurance fund.

It was somewhat absurd to deny to those who had full responsibility for raising a fund, any role in managing it. Such unreasonable posturing could only interfere with the Party's ability to gain adherents. But the fact remains that the Communists were the only

organized mass movement to make unemployment insurance a fundamental part of day to day program.²²

There were other efforts in the direction of unemployment insurance, but they were all of a much more limited scope. The problem was nationwide, yet, Irving Bernstein writes, "few supporters of jobless insurance advocated a federal system" Senator F. Wagner Sr., who, in the early months of 1930, was working on legislation to reduce the harsh effects of unemployment, specifically excluded the concept of social insurance from his program, arguing that it would threaten acceptance of his over-all package. As Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor under Roosevelt, later recorded, "None of us thought in terms of a federal law."²³

The American Association for Labor Legislation had, it is true, asked Wagner to accept its own plan for a nationally administered system of protection against unemployment. Only after Wagner refused did the Association decide to restrict itself to working on the state level. But that is where its focus stayed. Of greater importance is the fact that the AALL's measure was not, strictly speaking, a program of unemployment insurance at all, but a plan for creating an industry-based reserve against unemployment. Industry would contribute to the fund, and be totally responsible for its management, while individual companies which stabilized employment in their own enterprises would be eligible to have money returned to them. The AALL specifically called its measure "An American Plan for Unemployment Reserve Funds." The Association went to great lengths to make sure that its ideas would in no way be linked to foreign, socialistic schemes of unemployment insurance.²⁴

The measure introduced into the Wisconsin state legislature by Harold M. Groves in 1931, and signed into law by governor Philip F. La Follette in January, 1932, also established unemployment reserves, not a system of unemployment insurance. It was based upon a program designed by John L. Commons a decade earlier, and brought up to date in 1931 by Paul Raushenbush, an economist at the state university who had once been a student of Commons'. Commons had called his idea "extraordinarily an individualistic and capitalistic scheme."²⁵ The AALL plan, and the Groves law, were important policy steps. However, they did not reflect as far reaching or broad a concept of government responsibility for welfare as did the overall Communist program. In fact, in Wisconsin, the Communists opposed the Groves Bill. Unemployment insurance was still too progressive an idea for the times. Outside the Communist party, few, in this country in the early thirties, were prepared to advocate it.

The Communist program directly challenged institutional arrangements, but its goals could be shaped by immediate struggles and day to day action in the workplace and community. TUUL workers had a constant reminder of the ways in which their union movement attempted to combine the revolutionary with the everyday. Its major slogans were printed upon the back of their membership cards.

Against Capitalist Rationalization (Speed-Up)
 Organize the Unorganized
 7 Hour Day--5 Day Week
 For Higher Wages
 For Social Insurance
 For Class Struggle--Against Class Collaboration
 For Militant Industrial Unionism--Against A.F. of L.
 Craft Unionism
 Against Imperialist War
 Defend the Soviet Union
 Full Social, Racial, and Political Equality for
 Negroes...

Organize Within the Reformist Unions Against the
Bureaucrats...

For a Revolutionary Workers Government in the
United States... 26

These were a strange melange of plausible-sounding but militant demands on the one hand, and stark, unconvincing Bolshevik rhetoric on the other. It is easy, today, to condemn the rhetoric, but one must remember that the seizure of power in Russia had occurred only in the previous decade, and that, in the context of world politics, revolutionary solutions to the problems of industrial society were not without resonance.

There is another point to consider. The TUUL's program, revolutionary or not, described the projectory of demands which the American labor movement would soon be making. Leaving aside its calls in support of Soviet foreign policy, its advocacy of a workers' state, and its implicit dual unionism, the program raised slogans which, by 1935, would seem neither outlandish or unreasonable. It cannot be ruled out, therefore, that the Communists played a significant role in stimulating the new set of rights and demands that American labor soon began putting together for itself. I want, in the remainder of the chapter, to consider this possibility in a bit more depth.

Almost immediately after it was established, the TUUL looked for ways to extend its program beyond member unions. It did this by creating community based organizations of the unemployed and poor, Unemployed Councils. Councils were set up in many cities, "achieving their greatest strength," Irving Bernstein writes, "in Chicago and Pittsburgh."²⁷ On July 4, 1930, the TUUL called delegates from the Councils, along with full time Party organizers assigned to unemployed

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

in the

TRADE UNION UNITY LEAGUE

The undersigned declares his adherence to the T. U. U. L. program of militant Industrial Unionism based on the class struggle.

Name **Bernard B. Bailey**

Address **126 Franklin St S W**

City _____ Age _____

Occupation _____

Place of Work _____

Union Affiliation if any _____

MAIL THIS CARD TO 3782 WOODWARD AVENUE, DETROIT 34

AGIT-PROP WORK

15

Agit Prop Work



YOUNG FELLOWS AND GIRLS ?

CAN YOU GET RELIEF FROM THE CITY OR CHAIRMAN?
DO YOU INTEND TO CLIMB IN THE PAGES?????????
WHO WANTS TO WALK THE STREETS WITH AN EMPTY
STOMACH????????????????????
DO YOU HATE THE BOARD OF EDUCATION BECAUSE
TO FEEL THE HUNGER CHILDREN????????????
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR DEFECTION????????

WE ACCUSE



MAYOR ROESCH AND THE CITY COUNCIL
AND THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

OF STARVING

thousands of children and unemployed youth who are starved
of the City of Buffalo

WE CHALLENGE these officials to defend themselves at the

PUBLIC TRIAL
ON THANKSGIVING DAY
NOV. 26th AT 3 PM
565 WILLIAM ST.

Come to this PUBLIC TRIAL and have your say on how conditions are at home. The Youth Com. of the Unemployed Council challenges the City officials and the Board of Education to come to this trial and to defend themselves. Anyone will have the opportunity to express his or her opinions.

YOUTH COMMITTEE
BUFFALO UNEMPLOYED COUNCIL

A GOOD YOUTH LEAFLET

T. U. U. L. POLICIES

Against Capitalist Rationalization
(Speed-up).
Organize the Unorganized.
7-Hour Day—5-Day Week.
For Higher Wages.
For Social Insurance.
For Class Struggle—Against Class
Collaboration.
For Militant Industrial Unionism—
Against A. F. of L. Craft Unionism.
Against Imperialist War.
Defend the Solid Union.
Full Social, Racial and Political
Equality for Negroes.
Organize Youth and Women Workers.
Organize Within the Reformist Unions
Against the Bureaucrats.
Defeat the Misleaders of Labor.
Build Labor Unity.
Build the T. U. U. L.
For World Trade Union Unity.
Exclude Reactionary Workers' Government in the United States.

Above: TUUL membership card
From: TUUL Organizational File, Tamiment Archives,
New York University

Right: An organizing leaflet from the early thirties. It is totally concerned with local issues and grievances, though the language is inflammatory and militant.

Party Organizer, December, 1931, p. 15

work, to a convention in Chicago, Here, the National Council of the Unemployed was formally brought into being.²⁸

The unemployed councils were conceived by the Communists as organizational tools for carrying social and political struggle into working-class neighborhoods. They made, as the centerpiece of their program, the demand for a Federal Unemployment Insurance Law, and used the issue of government welfare as a basis for community action and mobilization. Most of the campaigns and happenings for which they were responsible, it follows, were related, in one way or another, to the problem of local relief.

The programmatic demands of the Unemployed Councils were listed and described in an organizing pamphlet put out by the TUUL in February, 1931. The pamphlet, entitled 'Fight! Don't Starve', was an attempt to agitate for, and publicize, the recently established councils. It will be helpful to cite a number of the program's 'demands and tasks', as the Party called them, convey a flavor of the kinds of ideas and political directions which the Communists, through neighborhood organization, were attempting to introduce into the discourse of community action.

Creation of a fund by the City and State government to adequately feed, house, and clothe the unemployed and their families, the fund to be administered by workers...

Free rent for the unemployed. Organize rent strikes to lower all rents.

Organize struggles against high prices of foods.

Demand free milk for all babies, free food and clothing for the children of the unemployed.

Demand vacant houses and apartments, vacant buildings, hotel rooms, etc., for housing of unemployed...

Fight against repossession of furniture and other belongings by credit corporations. No instalment payments while unemployed...

Free medical and dental service, free medicine and hospital beds...

Carry on the fight for Unemployment Insurance from the national government. Discuss Unemployment Insurance at all meetings of workers' organizations, at all workers' mass meetings. Pass resolutions supporting this demand.

Calls for free food, free housing, and free medical care were not, perhaps, particularly realistic. However, it is true that, in the South at least, many landlords' agents preferred having their frame houses occupied by unemployed workers for \$1.00 a month, or so, than to see the property vandalized and torn apart for firewood.²⁹ Still, to analyze the program of the unemployed councils in terms of how attainable its demands were, is to miss the point.

The aim of the program was to stimulate people to organize, to show that collective action could effect change. From this perspective, the Councils met with some success. They circulated petitions, held open-air meetings, sponsored hunger marches on city halls and state capitals. There were demonstrations in front of relief offices, and angry confrontations with municipal officials responsible for relief administration. Putting back the furniture of evicted tenants or, where possible, surrounding the deputies assigned to removing the furniture with a large and hostile crowd of neighbors, was another familiar activity.

There is, of course, no way to establish how many people were exposed to the slogans, campaigns, and actions of the Communists, or in what ways. There is no way of telling how many pamphlets and



Demands For
Unemployment Insurance
 MADE UPON THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

Price

5c

Organize Unemployed Councils!

*Continue the Struggle for Unemployment Insurance!
 Fight for Immediate Relief!*

DEMANDS AND TASKS OF UNEMPLOYED COUNCILS

Creation of a fund by the City and State government to adequately feed, house and clothe the unemployed and their families, the fund to be administered by workers.

Fight against evictions and vagrancy laws.

Free gas, light, fuel for all unemployed.

Free rent for the unemployed. Organize rent strikes to lower all rents.

Organize struggles against high prices of food.

Demand free milk for all babies, free food and clothing for the children of the unemployed.

Demand vacant houses and apartments, vacant buildings, hotel rooms, etc., for housing of unemployed.

Fight the police terror and prison discipline in the bread lines and flop houses.

Fight against repossession of furniture and other belongings by credit corporations. No instalment payments while unemployed.

Fight all discrimination against Negro and foreign born workers.

Free medical and dental service, free medicine and hospital beds.

Union wages on all public work.

Exemption of taxes and mortgage payments for all unemployed workers who own their homes.

Unity of the unemployed workers with the employed workers in strikes against wage cuts and speed-up, and the shorter work-day without reduction in wages.

Carry on the fight for Unemployment Insurance from the national government. Discuss Unemployment Insurance at all meetings of workers' organizations, at all workers' mass meetings. Pass resolutions supporting this demand.

For information and directions address

Trade Union Unity League



2 West 15th Street, New York, N. Y.

Program of the Unemployed Councils: Front and back cover of a pamphlet published by the Trade Union Unity League, February, 1931

From: 1931 Organizational File, Pamphlet Archives, New York University

leaflets were read, or how many workers paused to listen to a TUUL speaker at a factory-gate, before going on through to the job. There is no record of how many of the unemployed and working poor joined a hunger march, or attended a protest meeting or knocked on the door of an unemployed council to ask for help with an unfriendly landlord, a creditor, an unfeeling bureaucrat in a downtown relief office.

On a deeper lever of impact, there is no way of knowing how many individuals, in extension of some form of encounter with Communist agitation, began to think about the potential for organizing the unorganized into industrial unions, or to view unemployed and black workers more as allies than as probable scabs, or to consider the philosophical notion that government had a direct responsibility for the social well-being of its people. The Communists were not the only ones saying these things. But, as even the leadership of the CIO recognized when the time came to build forces for a direct confrontation with industry, few were pushing these ideas with such persistence, militancy, and concern for mass involvement.

Even those most critical of the Communists are led, by the evidence of the times, to grant that Communist practice had enough resonance and community support to induce change in the political environment. "... (T)he Communist program among the unemployed was a failure," states Irving Bernstein. "Its principal achievements were to raise relief standards in some communities, and to hasten the coming of federal relief." If the Communist program raised relief standards, and hastened the coming of Federal welfare, then why were the Unemployed Councils a failure? For such an end, Bernstein informs his readers, "could hardly have been a major objective, if it

did not actually defeat the party's purpose."³⁰

Ignore, but only for a moment, so provincial a reading of Communist motivation and theory of social action. In its bald form, Bert Cochran points out,

the proposition that Communists did not or do not want to improve the conditions of the working class is false, or at least, simplistic. It cuts across much of the conduct of Communist parties and members. Communists think they are connecting immediate struggles with labor's historic mission to reconstruct society. That does not mean that they are indifferent to improvements of workers' conditions on the job or through welfare legislation.³¹

Yet, allowing for the most narrow view possible of the meaning of Communist behavior, a certain historical consensus remains. The Communists, in spite of political bumbling, obvious attempts at intellectual manipulation, and deep misreadings of the temper and orientation of the American working class, helped to pump alternate conceptions of social policy into public consciousness; they made visible contributions to the emergence of federal relief, social insurance, and the progressive legislation of the New Deal in general.

What does remain puzzling is how, in face of their minuscule forces, absurdly high fluctuation rate, and organizational isolation, the Communists managed to accomplish as much as they did. Workers did not join the Communist party or the Communist trade-unions or the Communist unemployment councils in any significant numbers. And when they did join, they soon moved on. They could understand neither the discipline, nor the demand for total immersion in a concept of revolutionary imminence that had absolutely nothing to do with what was going on in their minds, or with what they saw as the defining structural boundary of the society into which they were born.

Nothing the Communists did, at this historical moment, could have brought American workers across the sociological and cultural barriers that separated them from revolutionary consciousness. Yet the voice of the Communist party was clearly heard in the rising chorus of demands that adequate food, clothing, and shelter be considered basic rights in modern society. The Communists made a significant contribution to the developing recognition that, through organized and disciplined collective action, one could challenge the decisions and directions of social and political authority.

Still, visibility, sharply formulated ideological programs, and confrontational political campaigns alone were not enough to weight the American Communist party with the kind of impact and concern, in relation to its actual numbers, it always managed to generate in the years of the Party's ascendance. The Communists were able to reach the political consciousness of American laborers, in however limited a fashion, through the endless variety of direct shop and community actions that they carried on in small discrete almost invisible ways. For the Communist party to have radiated the presence it did in the 1930's, for it to have won the recognition it received from the CIO, for it not to have undergone the fate of the IWW, and collapsed into a small ineffectual sect, it needed a tangible base in the struggles of the time. Through its shop and street units, which always sought specific campaigns by which to draw an aggrieved citizenry, it provided the abrasive rub of practical experience, the draining but re-assuring feel of constant involvement, the stimulation, vigor, and shock brought by collective confrontation.

According to the paradigm of radical politics presented in

Chapter I, in order for a movement to be empirically identified as radical, it must, as a minimum, operate within the framework of a clearly expressed ideology of class conflict. Over the course of the entire Third Period, the practice of the American Communist party met this criterion. For its program was consistently developed in terms of ideas that unambiguously asserted the existence of a fundamental conflict of interest between labor and capital. The expression of these ideas, through various platforms, slogans, and campaigns, does not make the Party's picture of reality, true, of course. Given the plausibility of the definitions proposed earlier, it just makes that picture radical.

The final component of the paradigm, however, requires more than just the ideological projection of concepts and values rooted in the theory of historical materialism and the ideal of a classless society. There must be direct contact between organizers and exploited groups on those levels where the fight to change unacceptable life conditions can be immediately known and experienced. Thus, the ongoing efforts at street-level organization, and the sense of underlying Communist continuity and stability which these conveyed, increased the Party's credibility when it came to local action and struggle. They counter-balanced much else the Party did and said in its propaganda, and in its faction fights with other groups on the Left. The insistent hammering of Communist militants, their unwavering political presence, their permanently renewed search for a practice that could precipitate conflict, and expose the contradictions of everyday life, brought ideology to Earth.

It is my contention that the existence of both of these modes

of involvement--the clear statement of the principles of class struggle as the backdrop to action, and, at the same time, action which, itself, is geared to the immediate concerns, beliefs, perceptions, and life situations of workers--are necessary for the realization of an authentic political radicalism. These are precisely the over-all concepts which I attempted to trace back to their roots in the thought of Marx, Lenin, and Luxemburg. To the extent that the Party and its activists were able to merge these two aspects of practice, to that extent they were able to fulfill the Party's promise of itself as radical. For conscious intervention into the social character of people's lives, on both the levels of ideology and direct experience of the world, is the very essence of the radical enterprise, as that concept is defined by the proposed working model.

One cannot understand Communist radicalism, or radicalism in general, unless one grasps the extent and nature of struggles of the quotidian. In the chapter to follow, I will examine the structure and character of some of the American party's activity in this area. I will present as comprehensive a picture as I can, in the space available, of what these attempts to reshape the world of the familiar and routine looked like, what it was that made up their reality, and how, finally, they functioned so as to inform the Party's practice with a radical quality and cast.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

¹See Theodore Rosengarten, All God's Dangers, The Life of Nate Shaw (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), pp. 296-343, and Appendix; Cochran, p. 47

²Irving Bernstein, Turbulent Years (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1971), p. 490

³Steve Nelson, James R. Barret, and Rob Ruck, Steve Nelson, American Radical (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), p. 33

⁴Ibid.

⁵David J. Saposs, Left-Wing Unionism (New York: International Publishers, 1926), pp. 49-50

⁶William Z. Foster, American Trade Unionism (New York: International Publishers, 1947), pp. 54-55

⁷Saposs, pp. 50-51

⁸Foster, p. 144

⁹Saposs, pp. 51, 55, 56

¹⁰See Irving Bernstein, The Lean Years (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966), Chs. 9, 10; Foster, Part Two; Cochran, Ch. 3

¹¹Foster, p. 149

¹²Cochran, p. 32

¹³Cochran, p. 43-45; Howe and Coser, pp. 253-254; The Communist International, vol. 3, pp. 373-377

¹⁴Foster, pp. 177-178; The Trade Union Unity League, Its Program, Structure, Methods and History (New York: Trade Union Unity League, 1930), p. 33; John Williamson, Dangerous Scot (New York: International Publishers, 1969), p. 74; Howe and Coser, p. 255; Daily Worker 15 May, 1933, Section II, p. 4

¹⁵Bernstein, Lean Years, p. 141; Howe and Coser, p. 256

¹⁶Foster, pp. 199-201

¹⁷James R. Green, The World of the Worker (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), p. 131; Nelson, Barret, and Ruck, pp. 36-37

¹⁸Green, p. 131

¹⁹The Trade Union Unity League, pp. 26-27

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 27, 32, 40

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 37-38

²²*Ibid.*, p. 39

²³Bernstein, Lean Years, pp. 490, 501

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 491

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 499

²⁶TUUL Organizational File, Tamiment Library, New York University, New York

²⁷Bernstein, The Lean Years, p. 428

²⁸"Fight! Don't Starve!" (New York: Trade Union Unity League, 1931), p. 4

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 20; See Nell Irvin Painter, The Narrative of Hosea Hudson, His Life as a Negro Communist in the South (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 117

³⁰Bernstein, Lean Years, p. 434

³¹Cochran, p. 352, Note 10

CHAPTER SEVEN

BEING RADICAL (2):

THE CHARACTER OF DAY TO DAY PRACTICE

The Communists could never understand why, in the days of Third Period militancy, people would respond to their campaigns and slogans, but then refrain from actually joining the Party or any of its organizations. "In the last nine months," John Williamson wrote in The Communist, towards the middle of 1930, "four outstanding events took place which vividly brought home the correct Party estimation of the present period." These events were an anti-war demonstration, the Cleveland TUUL Convention, the March 6 Unemployment Demonstrations, and the May Day Demonstrations.¹

The Unemployment Demonstrations were particularly impressive. There were large gatherings in almost every major city or industrial center in the United States, and numbers were involved far beyond the Party's immediate influence. The most cautious estimates suggest that 2,000 marched in San Francisco, 5,000 in Chicago, 10,000 in Cleveland, 35,000 in New York, 1,000 in Trenton, New Jersey. Marchers numbered in the thousands in Milwaukee, Youngstown, Pittsburgh, Buffalo. In Washington D.C. and in Seattle, police used tear gas to disperse crowds. There was violence in Boston, Detroit, and Cleveland, and a major riot

in New York city.²

The Communists, not unreasonably, took such outpourings as evidence that there was some support for their demands for social insurance and federal relief. Yet such clear and obvious examples of Communist impact did not produce any material increase in membership or strength. "... (W)ith each of these magnificent victories," Williamson complained, "the gap between the political influence and organizational strength... of the Party becomes wider."³ The Communists did not see that, while workers were prepared to take up those notions and values which promised them 'a fairer shake', they were prepared to take them up only in ways which were compatible with maintaining the basic order of American society.

The Communists invariably blamed themselves for their failings, rather than the resilience of the workers' belief in capitalist ideology. After all, the Sixth Comintern Congress had declared that this belief was fading, and so, fading it must be. "Why is it," Browder wrote in preparation for the Central Committee's Twelfth Plenum, in 1930,

....that at a moment when the immediate needs of the workers are most pressing, that our revolutionary trade unions grow very slowly indeed, and some of them even retrogress? Something must be wrong. Is there something wrong with our general line, laid down by the Red International of Labor Unions in its World Congress, or is the fault in our methods of work, in our daily practice?

The answer must be that the line is absolutely correct... We must find the remedy of our weaknesses in the field of practice, of application, in the field where the general line is concretely applied to life.⁴

This sort of reasoning was the cornerstone of all Stalinist political method, and it continually led the Communists to undermine themselves. False expectations were created among the membership, which, in turn,

led to unnecessary feelings of defeat and despair. If correct leadership, and proper levels of resolution and investment, were bound to bring the workers to the Party, but the workers did not come, then it must be the cadres who were at fault.

Such a perspective tends towards a situation where doubts about one's own competence weaken the willingness to take risks, initiate decisions, and challenge authority. Cynicism emerges as those who mouth the accepted verities and explanations, whether they believe them or not, and engage in the right sorts of self-deprecation, are given support by the leadership structure, while those who say what they feel, and dare to raise some basic questions, now and again, find themselves criticized and shut out.

The absolute insistence that it was their own inadequacies which were responsible for the failure of the American working class to take up revolutionary consciousness, did have some positive consequences for the Communists. They pushed themselves always to the limits of their endurance and ability. And they turned with ever greater intensity to the refinement of techniques for projecting radical ideas and militant programs of action into society on direct and face to face levels.

In this chapter I will make a detailed study of the ways in which the Communists developed, and carried out, these principles of close ideological struggle. I will focus particularly on three areas of contact: community work, work among the unemployed, and work in the factory shops. I start with Browder's report of the political committee to the Twelfth Plenum, made in November, 1930. For here, Browder struck the theme of 'the importance of the immediate'. This notion guided the Party's practice throughout the Third Period, and for as long as it

maintained its own distinct and independent centers of organization and action.

"We are not yet facing the struggle for power in the United States," Browder reminded his listeners at the Plenum. "We are facing the struggle for the leadership of the masses." How could the Communists attain this leadership?

The Party must learn in practice how to transform our correct general slogans into concrete immediate demands of the masses in their daily lives... Precisely because we are the Party of the proletarian dictatorship, we must become the foremost leader of smallest struggles for the smallest needs of the workers. Of course, this struggle for immediate demands must at all times be guided in every detail by revolutionary aims and perspectives.⁵

Browder then focused on key problem areas in the Party's efforts at organization. He suggested what the weaknesses of the Party were in each area, and offered methods for dealing with them. The difficulties, essentially, all came back to the same central point, failure to keep in touch with the wants, and immediate life experience of those whom the cadres were attempting to involve in struggle.

Browder's first concern was with the Party's work in both the red unions of the TUUL and in opposition groups in the A.F. of L. The Communists were simply not making any progress in these endeavours, and were even slipping back. Why?

We find...concentrations on large broad sweeping slogans, which express general class interests, but we do not express concrete immediate interests of a particular group of workers.

Browder complained that there was bad preparation and leadership of strike struggles, and weak connections between union apparatus, and rank and file. There was too great a tendency to depend upon paid functionaries to carry on the work. "Our committees tend to melt away

and reduce themselves to one person instead of a strong collective body which works as a unit and gives force, energy, and push to the organization." These faults, Browder insisted, were just varieties of the same problem. They stemmed from Communist vanity, he said pointedly, from simple neglect of people's daily needs, from dissociation with their perceptions, and sense, of their own reality.⁶

Similar difficulties plagued Communist work among the unorganized and unemployed. In non-union shops, one of the reasons the Communists did not succeed more, Browder said, "is because our approach...has been practically that of organizing them only for the final revolutionary battle..."

Why should they join the Party? They do not understand Communist theory, and we have not shown them the connection between our theory and the shop problems. We must approach the workers in the shops to organize them on the basis of their own needs and problems, and stimulate them as the organizing agents themselves...

The mechanism for reaching the unorganized in the shops, Browder said, referring to a resolution of the ECCI on American trade-union work, should be the grievance committee. "The workers generally understand that when you speak of the grievance committee, you mean the beginning of organization of the workers around some demand, around some grievance against the boss," Browder told the Plenum. The goal was for the workers to see the unions as an instrument for social change, not just a means of improving working conditions. But they would never come to the former, unless Communists were involved in helping them formulate and fight for demands that would achieve the latter. To bring workers eventually to the struggle for power, Browder wrote, they must be shown "how the revolutionary struggle led by the Communists is at the same time the

most practical producer of immediate relief."⁷ Communists had to be less concerned with getting the workers to storm the barricades next week, and more concerned with getting them some bread and butter on the table this afternoon.

In the unemployed movement, the central organizing issues were the Social Insurance bill, and the anti-eviction drives. Both of these were seen as leading to forms of direct action in neighborhoods and local districts, signature collections, for example, and demonstrations for greater municipal relief, "including fights for free gas, free water, and free electricity in the homes of the unemployed..." These campaigns provided the basis for an unlimited series of actions that could bring Communists into closer political contact with workers and their organizations. "From this we must go further, we must have hunger marches to state capitals, delegations to Congress in Washington..., simultaneously with mass street demonstrations, all with a foundation of local and neighborhood demands."⁸ In sum, for radical movement to occur, organizations that sought both the eventual overthrow of capitalism and immediate solutions to immediate problems, had to establish themselves locally, and grow roots that would extend deeply into the life of factory shops and working class communities.

The result was not the emergence of revolutionary consciousness, as the Communists hoped and expected. But there did follow intense drives and programs which educated people to the value of group actions, to the mechanics of community and trade-union organizations, and to a growing sense that, through planned collective behavior, and systematic hammering at the restraints of the system, change of some sort was possible.

The key to all Communist organizational work on the local level was the party nucleus, which, as time wore on, became referred to more simply as the party unit. "All our decisions, resolutions, and directives are meaningless unless the instrument of the party to carry these into life is properly equipped," wrote John Williamson in the May, 1931, edition of The Communist. "That instrument is essentially the Party nuclei."⁹

The nuclei were not the secret, conspiratorial groups, under direct control of Moscow, that the simpler anti-Communist imagination often pictured them to be. Shop nuclei disguised their existence, often, simply in order to protect members' jobs. While it is also true that many workers on the line rejected bald Communist manipulation, the goal of militants was always to reach a point where the nuclei could be brought out into the open. They were conceived as nothing less than the front line activating agencies in the struggle for socialism. (See the attached chart.)

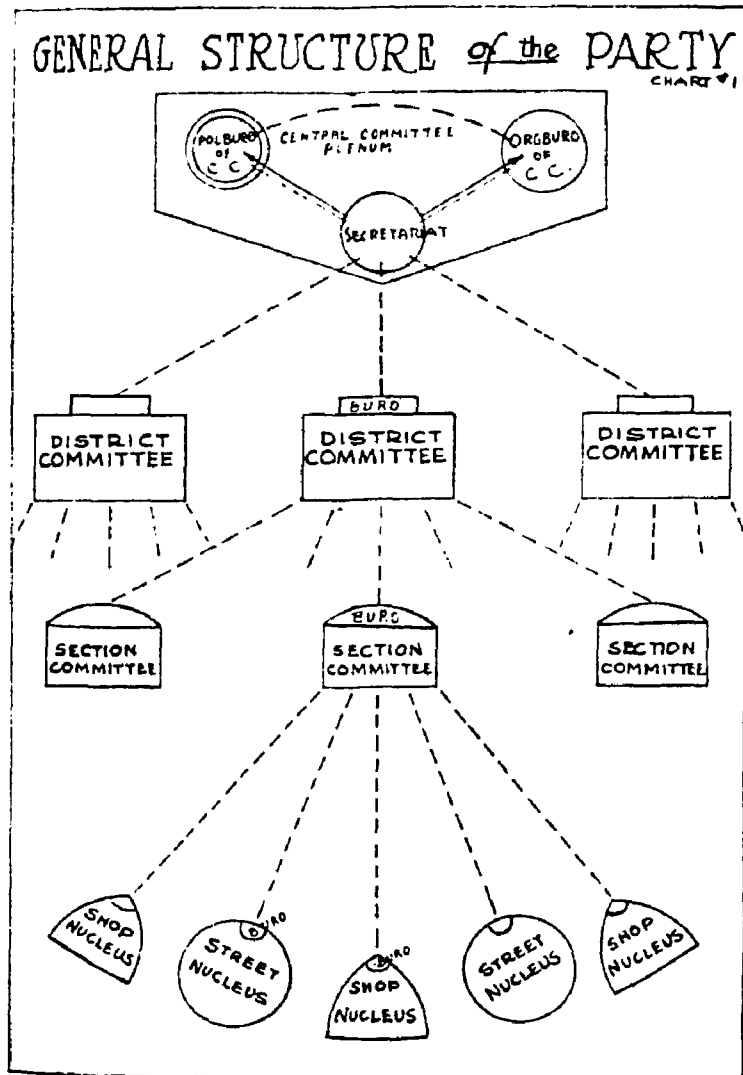
All direct organizational work stemmed from the nuclei. Mass demonstrations, hunger marches, and assaults on relief bureaus could not further the goals of radical theory unless they brought forth committees of action that retained existence after the immediate event was over, accepted direction from the Party, and won for it new members. To set up and oversee such committees, and to expand the organizational impact and influence of the Party on its immediate, localized environment, was precisely the function of the nuclei. "They are the connecting link between the masses and the Party," Williamson wrote,

Not only are they the means of carrying out the Party line and directives. They are also the first picture--a sort of 'reception room' view--which the new recruit gets of the Party and its life.

The nuclei were little social agencies in their own right, accountable to the Party as a whole for their programs and political direction,

GENERAL STRUCTURE OF PARTY

7



Organizational chart from the early thirties. The nucleus is in the front. Party Organizer, May, 1931, p. 7

but bearing major responsibility for the Party's immediate efforts to influence, organize, and recruit working people.

Discussions of the theory and practice of functioning nuclei appeared in the Party theoretical and educational literature quite frequently in the first half of the Third Period. They provide insights not only as to what the rank and file Party organizers were expected to do, and how they were expected to do it, but what they actually did, and the kinds of problems they encountered in trying to do it. The nuclei were described as having, for example, four main divisions of responsibility. The first was to "know its territory".

This knowledge should not be merely geographical, but should include the shops; the problems of the workers in the shops; the unions and mass organizations; the nationality of the workers; the housing and school conditions in the territory. The nucleus should come in contact with the workers and be alert politically to the moods and conditions of the workers in and out of the shops.

Already, one gets a sense, here, of the kind of issues and situations the Party workers sought out, and involved themselves in. On this level, they functioned directly as community organizers, except that their interest was not solely in correcting a community or workshop grievance for its own sake, but in showing its relation to larger questions of social inequity, and class conflict. This, in fact, was the second responsibility of the nucleus. "To develop all phases of mass work, around the grievances in the factories and the neighborhood problems in the territory. The nucleus should carry to the masses all campaigns and activities of the Party." Its third responsibility was to bring people into the Party itself, and into its mass organizations, such as the International Workers' Order, the International Labor Defense, or

the Young Communist League. And finally, the nucleus had to know how "to function properly itself." It is an unquestionable fact of life that people who were proposing to make the socialist revolution, often did not know how to organize an agenda for a meeting, or how to get the meeting started on time.

District supervisors were often critical of the way the nuclei, for which they were responsible, carried out tasks, but their criticisms often give a sharp and detailed picture of the day to day activities of the rank and file Communist organizer. The complaint most often registered was that the nucleus was "primarily an organ of agitation." John Williamson, for example, listed the sorts of activities one would find if one followed the activity of a typical 'good' nucleus in Chicago. There would be collections of signatures--for an upcoming election, and for the social insurance bill. There would be distribution of all kinds of leaflets for demonstrations and meetings. Sale and distribution of Daily Worker at factory and house to house. Pasting posters. Visiting contacts. Issuing once a month shop bulletins. Inner discussion on subjects proposed.

From Williamson's point of view, however, there was something "primarily lacking" in all of this.

It is mass work, both in shops and neighborhood... The nucleus work around factories is too much mere leaflet distribution, but no individual agitation or organization... In a word, the Party nucleus is not a factor in its territory...in collecting signatures, committees were assigned to streets with no houses... Although some nuclei have been 'concentrating' on a particular factory and have dumped at least a ton of paper in the form of leaflets, not a single new member has been got...

The action was there. But somehow, agitation and involvement did not translate into new members, or lasting organizational structures. The

district supervisors blamed the nuclei for having insufficient contact and closeness with the workers. "... (T)he nucleus never spends time discussing the workers' conditions in the shop," Williamson argued; "how to reach the workers by individual contact; what are the grievances of the workers around which to formulate our partial demands. All of this is forgotten." The recommendations then made in the article provide a glimpse, beyond the passing out of leaflets, and the attendance at meetings and demonstrations, of what the Communist activists were expected to do with their time. It suggests some of the modes through which the Party members saw themselves coming into contact with American workers, and enhancing the development of class consciousness. Factories chosen for concentration should, if possible, be ones where Party members were already working. The nucleus should try to get other Party organizers jobs in those factories. "Work on the outside should not be limited to leaflet distribution," Williamson insists. Comrades should mingle with the other workers at noon time. They should talk with them about the job. At nights and on weekends, they should go to the houses of the workers who live in the area, with petitions, leaflets, literature, the Daily Worker. "Value every individual contact and cultivate it," admonishes Williamson. "We are too careless with contacts."¹⁰

Clearly, all of this was easier said than done. Not all workers welcomed Communist visitors on their doorstep, or felt comfortable griping about job conditions during lunch, where they might be overheard by a spy, or cared to be told about how much 'better' conditions were in the Soviet Union. Bertha Bazell, a woman now in her 80's, recalls in the Oral History collection at Tamiment Library, how she was thrown down a flight of stairs one day, trying to distribute the Daily Worker

in a Coney Island tenement.¹¹ It is understandable, therefore, if many of the militants tended to stay together, and talk mainly to one another. "First, the majority of our Party members are not active in the factory where they work," Jack Johnstone wrote in 1931,

they are not active in any union or league, or Unemployed Branch, their work is done with other Party members, their acquaintance becomes narrowed down to Party members, they become isolated from the masses, and begin to even forget how to use the simple language of the workers...

It is probably true that many of the Communists on the line showed a very human tendency to avoid the conflict inherent in extending themselves to non-Party workers. But there were other problems as well. Much of the organizational work was structured in a sloppy and inefficient manner. There was wasted effort, duplication, and areas where one hand did not know what the other was doing. "Take a typical unit," Johnstone continued,

We have a street nuclei in the Bronx of 25 members--all of them working in different factories or unemployed. The factories are located in territories of other sections of the Party. These sections have neither contact with or knowledge of what work, if any, these comrades are doing in the factory where they work... The result is they generally do nothing during working hours, rush home at night to carry out the work of the street nucleus; they hold aloof from the workers in their own factory, have no time for unions or league work, become detached from the workers, and the work carried out by their own unit suffers, thus weakening the entire Party...¹²

Communist practice was subject to the same recalcitrance, desire to take the easy way out, and tendency to oversight that plagues any human endeavor. Yet it would be false and unfair to assert that the Communists consistently failed to make close and demanding connections in their communities and workfloor shops.

These are two major sources to which one can turn in order to

begin to document the content, character, and quality of the rank and file's work on local levels. First, there are the commentaries, memoirs, autobiographies, and oral histories of old left militants, most of which emerged during the 1970's, years when American radicalism was trying to come to terms with itself. The most useful of these are the ones which focus on the experience of the front line organizer, rather than on the higher placed, often nationally visible, Communist functionary. The latter tend to get bogged down in introspective discussions of party politics and pressures. They offer little help in understanding what went on in the small crucial areas where direct, Communist activism crosshatched with local discontents and scarcely perceived social turbulence.

A second source for uncovering the nature of elemental Communist practice comes through the pages of the Party Organizer, a kind of in-house journal for militants. It dealt with the nuts and bolts of organizing, citing failures and accomplishments relating activities of local units from around the country, and offering general principles for making contacts, setting up groups, and running effective campaigns. It had no propaganda function whatever, so its approach to the problems of organizing was more relaxed than in the heavier, theoretical literature, and its language, less chained to the official rhetoric and 'correct formulations' of the day. It presents as broad and authentic a picture of the day to day content of Communist organizing as one will find. Here are the Communists in snapshot, puzzling out what 'being radical' meant, not in terms of great, historical cataclysms, but in relation to the ordinary and mundane search of working people for some dignity, and for greater control over their lives. As I have tried to indicate, it is the ability to relate the ideological to the local and

immediate, that invests action with radical import. In the remainder of this chapter I will try to capture some of the flavor conveyed both by the articles in the Organizer, and the recollections of those looking back, an attempting to assess the vibrancy of their experience as Communists.

Steve Nelson, who came to this country from Croatia after World War I, joined the Party while he was working in the auto industry in Detroit, in the mid-1920's. In 1929, he went to Chicago, where he became one of the earliest organizers of the unemployed. In his autobiography, which was set down on tape by two graduate students from the University of Pittsburgh, James Barrett and Rob Ruck, Nelson provides a description of how the Unemployed Councils were developed. The model was generally followed in all the urban areas where the Communists worked.

First a steering committee was set up by the Party's district Trade Union office. It worked in co-ordination with other district trade-union offices throughout the country. In Chicago, there was a garment worker on the steering committee, two representatives from the Steel and Metal Workers Industrial Union, someone from the International Labor Defense, some unemployed workers, a member of the Young Communist League, a business agent for the Journeymen Tailors Union, and the editors of the Communist Lituanian and Serbo-Croatian papers. The organizers on the committee were assigned to different sections of the city, where they knew what was going on in the factories and neighborhoods. They contacted Party members and sympathizers in their sections, "and it was around these little groups of two or three that the first unemployed councils were launched." The steering committee

did the planning and organizational work at first, "but once the movement started to grow, it was replaced by an Executive Committee of the Unemployed Councils of Chicago, which was composed of delegates elected from councils in various neighborhoods."

Nelson recounts that, during the first few weeks, the organizers spent a great deal of time agitating against capitalism, and talking about the need for socialism. At a meeting of Greek workers, Nels Kjar, an old Danish carpenter, and head of the Party's Trade Union Committee in Chicago, mentioned, in his speech, Lovestone's expulsion. Afterwards, "a wonderful Greek comrade" took Kjar aside. "'You know Comrade,' he said, 'you shouldn't have brought the Lovestone problem into it. These people don't know anything about that, and we have more important things to discuss.'" In this kind of way Nelson learned that, as an organizer, he had to focus on things that had meaning to the rank and file, not to the Central Committee of the party.¹³

This was a problem that many of the activists had to face. "...I want to say that one thing we have learned," a factory organizer wrote, "is that when I try to carry on work in that shop on the basis of direct Communist propaganda, bringing in newspapers to the workers, these workers were prejudiced against the Communists." His achievements rested with his ability to involve the workers collectively around small, seemingly trivial upsets. But they meant much to men and women who felt totally controlled by the employer.

One day, one of the workers forgot to ring up his card and he was docked, and he was sore. The same question came up where the foreman came to collect money for the Red Cross. This was supposed to be voluntary, but it was not. When

the workers refused, the foreman wrote in the names, and the workers had to contribute. The workers did not like it, and we utilized this to establish the 'Stick-Together Club,' and our problem is to broaden it out and try to establish some stronger form of organization where the workers would be able to carry on work on a wider scale.

What is not recognized in much of the criticism of the Party's Third Period stance is that, on the line, the most effective organizers set aside doctrine, though not their commitment to militant class struggle, and went about doing what they believed they had to do in order to develop class consciousness among their colleagues. It was out of the small things, the writer of the above lines continued, that forms of organization would be established, "and the workers recognized it as something they organized, decided on, and that it was on the basis of their own experiences and grievances, and they knew it was their own organization."¹⁴

In the street, the Unemployment Councils soon taught the Communists that they were going to have to talk less about the coming revolution, and more about ways of helping people to buy groceries, pay the rent, and survive in the meantime. Answers to these problems began to emerge, Steve Nelson writes, simply in the process of trying to find them.

...we learned to shift away from a narrow, dogmatic approach to what might be called a grievance approach to the organizing. We began to raise demands for immediate relief by the city and state, immediate federal assistance to the unemployed, and a moratorium on mortgages, and finally we began to talk about the need for national unemployment insurance.

People often came for help from neighborhoods where there were no Councils. The Communists would tell them to get a few neighbors together in their homes, and would then go over and meet with them to see what could be done. In this way, contacts were extended throughout the working class sections of the city. Now and again, people dissatisfied with the Communists would start a rival grouping. "Then there would be two organizations side by side. Sometimes neighborhood politics would get involved, and you might have bitter fights. It wasn't easy."

In a certain sense, the Communists on the neighborhood level functioned as social workers, using what today would be termed the 'advocacy' model. People would come into the Unemployment Council office looking for help to stay an eviction. Nelson would tell them who they could talk to at the relief office, but the people were often reluctant to go by themselves. 'We'll just be told to get out' they would answer, 'and we're not exactly sure what to say.'

So you say, 'O.K., I'll go down with you, but you present the case. I'll just back you up.' Because I could understand several Slavic languages, I also acted as an interpreter. A Polish worker might come and tell us that his wife was sick and needed a doctor, so I or someone else had to explain the problem to the welfare official. We spent much of our time simply learning the welfare rules in order to be effective.

The revolution waited, while Communists learned welfare regulations, in order to be able to explain to the poor what their rights were.

Nelson stressed that the Communists tried to make the Unemployment Councils an integral part of neighborhood existence. "For fundraising we tried to stage events that fit into the cultural life of the community." Bingo, raffles, picnics, and block parties were common. "Since the Catholic Church was always sponsoring such affairs, they were part of the natural way of life." The Council also sponsored

dances for young people. The hall was sometimes available, "and we could usually dig up an accordion player somewhere." In these ways, the Communists tried to establish the presence of their street units, block committees, and unemployed councils, not just as advanced guards of socialism, but as functioning, community-rooted, social agencies as well.¹⁵

Nelson writes from the point of view of one individual, close to fifty years after the events in question. It would be helpful to find ways of corroborating his general picture of the Communists' activity in local neighborhoods. Here, one might use a contemporary report, from a 1932 issue of the Party Organizer. This report, in comparison with Nelson's effort to get at the center of activities in these years, is externalized, and somewhat superficial. It is blemished by a transparent arrogance. Yet it confirms, on a slightly more distant plane, many of the details of Nelson's portrait of Communist block work, and has about it, as well, an aura of the everyday. Nelson worked in a Slavic community on Halsted Street in Chicago. The Beck Street Block Committee was located in a Jewish neighborhood in the East Bronx. The parallels that emerge, therefore, are all the more striking.

The Beck Street Block Committee comes into existence sometime in the early months of 1932, "as a result of a struggle against an eviction case that took place in 592 Beck Street." Once the Committee was established, workers began to come to it from surrounding blocks, seeking help to prevent evictions, get lower rents, and receive more aid from the local Relief office.

The Beck Street Block Committee is well known in the Home Relief Bureau, and when the officials of the Home Relief Bureau see the Committee they know they must give them attention, and accept their demands, because they realize the strength of this Committee.

One can be sure that the Block Committee was down to the Relief Office quite often, that the administrators were probably never very happy to see them, and that the organized pressure around specific cases and problems achieved some results. The Communists caught on very early to the fact that bureaucratic agents in professional helping services will usually put themselves out for clients only if they are pushed. Whether these agents quaked at the 'strength' of the committee, however, is another question.

After the rent strike at 592 Beck Street was won, the tenants at 581 and 587, all buildings owned by the same landlord, struck as well. The tenants' council from 592, along with the Unemployed Council of the Lower Bronx, helped organize and support the action. Rents were lowered by two and three dollars. The landlord also agreed not to evict the unemployed, and to recognize the tenants' committees.

The Block Committee, in order to win adherents and expand itself, ran what it called an educational campaign. It gave out leaflets, held open air meetings in the neighborhood, and sold literature, all designed to point out "the role of the Unemployed Council and the Communist Party in the struggle of the unemployed workers." The campaign must have been persuasive. "As a result, four of the best members of the Block Committee have already joined the Communist Party."

The activities of the Block Committees were made up of a series of constant involvements in the lives of the people of the community. Some incidents were more serious than others. "About two weeks ago a committee found that in 986 St. John Avenue, an unemployed worker, a father of two children, one nine months, and the other three years old, was sick because of lack of food." A delegation went down to the Home Relief

Bureau to demand that Bronx Lebanon Hospital be called, and made to take in the ailing man. Lebanon sent an ambulance, but wanted fifteen dollars for the pick-up.

...since the block committee was on the spot well organized, they went to the Jewish Social Service and forced them to pay for the ambulance. This worker, Mr. Dewah, died of starvation on the second day in the hospital. The Block Committee immediately issued a leaflet to the workers in that neighborhood explaining the reason for this worker's death. They held a demonstration protesting against the murder of this worker by the bosses.

Was the Beck Street Block Committee just using this tragedy to further its own political ends? The question itself distorts the reality--because it bypasses the complexity of the ideas, forces, and feelings by which these radicals of the common and unexceptional were motivated.

Each minuscule and seemingly insignificant act of the block committee was seen as a brick in the building of the revolution. They attended an empty-pot-and-pan demonstration at Bronx Borough Hall, and an Open Air Hearing in front of P.S. 54, events organized by the Bronx-wide Unemployment Council. When a new grocery opened on Beck Street, it looked to employ non-union help. The Block Committee intervened, with pickets and leaflets and delegations, one surmises, and the owner, according to the article, was forced to turn to the Food Workers Industrial Union, and hire two union men. There was also struggle against a rival block committee, the Block-Aiders, whose members were labeled by the Beck Street Communists as "agents of the bosses." Perhaps the Communists attacked them in this manner because they were affiliated with the Socialist party. Finally, the Committee set up an East Bronx Workers' Club. This was to function as a social organization, not just a political one. As I shall emphasize later, involvement in social activities outside the formal political sphere was

a cardinal element of Communist practice.¹⁶

The same general principles that guided the Communists in their independent community work, guided them in their work in factory shops. The goal was to become involved with workers on as many levels of their lives as possible, and to focus on immediate issues and needs, building upon them towards larger political questions and organizational attachments. An article on the function and purpose of shop papers made the idea clear.

Our shop papers as instruments of the Party must consciously and persistently help to educate the masses of the workers whom we reach. This requires the utilization of the concrete issues, the drawing of lessons from concrete struggles for general political conclusions, and to link this up with the position of the Communist Party.¹⁷

The old question of whether the Communists did not just 'use' issues inserts itself once again. But by now it should be clear that Communist activity was based on an inherently dual vision. Better conditions were never viewed as ends in themselves--to do so would be to abandon the very notion of radical practice. But small improvements in the quality of workers' lives were valued ends, nevertheless, and in organizing to achieve them, both Communists and non-Communists learned the necessary dynamics of collective action. The knowledge acquired in these dark and dreary years of the early thirties, eased the way for the CIO drives later on.

What were the responsibilities of those Communists who were 'concentrated' in key industries and factories? Their job was simple. They had to do whatever it was that went into organizing a Party nucleus, a TUUL branch, or a fraction in an already established movement. Such activities included:

...editing the shop paper, meeting with groups of sympathizers, meeting with workers of various language groups, arranging forums, lectures, mass meetings, demonstrations, and struggles on living conditions, sale of the Daily Worker, distribution of literature, raising of finances, as well as social and cultural activities in the neighborhoods where the workers live.

In addition, the activists had to maintain relations with the various Communist led mass organizations: the Unemployment Councils, the International Labor Defense, the League for the Struggle of Negro Rights, the International Workers' Order. These groups, theoretically, played a key role in setting a left-wing social context for the general activities of the Communist labor organizers.¹⁸

Within the framework of their over-all activities, the Communists looked to as many different kinds of specific grievances as possible, in order to develop an organizing consciousness among workers, and eventually win them to radicalism. No drinking fountains, dirty bathrooms, inadequate safety measures became issues picked up on, and elaborated in shop papers and leaflets. In one factory, the issue was safety shoes. "The workers had to have safety shoes, but were compelled to pay for them as much as \$3 and \$4 a pair. We raised the demand of free safety shoes. This stirred up workers who were not even in our organization." In still another shop, the issue was a bad odor, emanating from some chemicals. "The comrades immediately raised the question that they could not work under such conditions." A short work stoppage was organized, and, shortly thereafter, the chemical was changed.

The length of a rest period sometimes became an issue. At one shop, production moved along a belt. Since each operation depended on the successful completion of the one before it, no worker could go away

from the belt without a relief man taking his place. There were five minutes away from the belt in the morning, and five in the afternoon.

The workers

...thought this wasn't enough time, and were kicking about it all the time. One day we made a suggestion that all the men on that particular line should take fifteen minutes relief instead of five. All agreed that if every one would take fifteen minutes it would be easier to get away with it, than if only one worker did... I immediately seized that opportunity and pointed out to the workers that this was the only way we could get something in the shop, if we all stuck together, and the workers agreed.

When the relief man came around, relieving first one worker then another, he discovered that each man was staying away fifteen minutes, not five; the relief man, angered, turned the names in. "When the foreman saw the long list...and all the names, he didn't even come over to tell the workers about it." From then on, the workers took 15 minutes break, instead of five.

From this action a 'stick together' club was formed. This was no more than an informal work group, men in one shop, "who saw each other every day, and talked things over. We had no regular meetings or anything of the kind." This anonymous worker hoped to be able to take what had started, and push it into some form of union organization. "But shortly afterwards a lay-off came, and this organization did not function for some time." When the lay-off ended, the process of building a 'stick-together club' started all over again.¹⁹

There are simply too many of these sorts of incidents to recount. But that is exactly the point. The history of the American Communist party cannot be written simply in terms of its faction fights, its strikes, and demonstrations, its role in the CIO. There is a whole

area of activity, one which, by its nature, tends towards historical invisibility, but which can be seen and captured, if more spectacular doings are left out of the foreground for a moment. This is the area through which the Party grounded its ideas about class struggle in the immediate work of political organization. It is for this reason I argue that it should be seen as a crucial aspect of the American Party's radicalism.

One element of local Communist activism, which is neglected in most studies of the Party, is its concern with informal social relationships. How could one extend one's organizing values into one's personal life? And if one didn't make such an effort at extension, what did that say about the sincerity of one's socialism? "At certain times we felt that the union wasn't enough," Stella Nowicki, a longtime Communist organizer in the Chicago stockyards told an oral history group.

We worked in the stockyards with blacks, but when we came home, we went to lily-white neighborhoods and the blacks went to their ghetto. How were we going to bridge that?...There was no concern on the part of anyone, the city fathers, the church, the union and others, about the needs of young people... There were a bunch of young people--I was twenty-four or so--and we felt that our needs were not being met by the unions.

So Stella Nowicki and her friends in the Party went about setting up a Youth Council--the Back of the Yards Youth Council.²⁰ Its goal was to organize social and political activities for the young people of the area. Sports were an important part of their program. "One of the things that we felt we should do was fight to get blacks into professional baseball," Stella Nowicki recalls. One of the activities carried out by the people of this Youth Council was a visit to the Chairman of the Central Labor Council, pressuring him to exert labor

influence to get blacks on Chicago's baseball teams. This was almost a decade before Jackie Robinson would finally make it to the Brooklyn Dodgers.

In all of their groupings, the quality of social relationships was always an issue for the Communists. Evenings in one another's homes, informal gatherings, dances, these were believed to be important ways of establishing relationships that encompassed a dimension of people's lives left untouched by the straight political work. "Social life is only known to small circles of personal friends in the movement," an organizer from Pittsburgh complains.

The Party as such, the comrades in the Party meet each other weekly at meetings, in the Block Committees, in delegations, demonstrations, eviction fights, etc. Insofar as developing a real comradely and Communist spirit amongst comrades, this is practically unknown.

The solution proposed by the unit was to get together at someone's house, one New Year's night. "Every comrade promised to bring a little food, coffee, cake, sugar, etc., along, and another comrade promised to supply the music. Over 30 comrades showed up, Negro and white." At least 10 were non-Party.

Social evenings had political meaning for the Communists, precisely because they were out of the realm of the immediately political. It let people relax together, it softened them, it brought them into contact with the popular culture of the time. Men and women could dress up a little, or touch while dancing, or sit next to each other on couches. And further, such social get-togethers allowed the radicals a logical, natural way for breaking down other, deeper, more difficult social barriers.

The bringing together of our white and Negro comrades in these social gatherings (and not only at big dances, meetings, etc.), does very much to really convince our comrades that the fight for full social equality is not only a hackneyed phrase that we use for special purposes and mass meetings...

The politics of radical awareness could not end simply because working hours were over, or it was Saturday night, or one didn't feel like doing anything but stay home this evening.²¹

The activities of the block committees, unemployment councils, and shop groups of the Third Period, the nature of the organizing experiences they produced, compose a set of variations on a common theme. All are concerned with the wedge of immediate grievance, as the tool for opening the door to class consciousness. All seek to take the local, and place it in the context of the general and historical, which, for the Communists, meant taking the particular, and relating it to the programs and purposes of their national section of the Comintern. Finally, all have an inherent mechanism that expands more and more deeply into the sphere of the personal, so that the entire frame of one's life becomes subject to the values of the movement. This, for the Communists, was no intrusion on the freedom of the human personality. They saw it, rather, as the condition for the unity of theory and practice, for the realization of consistency and integrity in individual and social action.

What the Communists sought in concept, of course, was not necessarily achieved in reality. Essential components of Stalinist ideology, I have already argued, functioned to take these notions of struggle, and turn them inside out, transforming them into grotesque mockeries of themselves. The point to recognize, however, is that while the manipulative character of Stalinist practice never ceased to dominate

the political outcomes in the American party, there were accomplishments and directions that were valid in their own right.

The rank and file Communist organizers were people in search of ways to challenge and remold the consciousness of the society around them. Their sphere of action was the local and immediate. Their principles of behavioral intervention were to take direct experience, find and raise its social meaning to a conscious level, and then shape the new insights and reactions that occurred in accordance with collectivist ideas and values.²² The Communists were convinced that small, militant actions, openly tied to communal goals and structures, and coupled with a matrix of planned, but informal programs for redirecting social and personal life, would eventually release whatever revolutionary potential was locked within capitalist society.

Although it is distorted by its irrevocable attachment to the Stalinist Third International, there is a provocative theory of community action buried within local Communist practice. Based upon the conscious use of self and organization for the achievement of ideological and structural change, it has yet to be removed from its tainted settings, and fully recast into a workable tool of community intervention.

In the next chapters I will examine the ways in which the elemental particles of radical practice became dissolved, during the later years of the Popular Front, in the doctrine of political cohabitation. This set of ideas began to emerge from the highest leadership of the American party shortly after Roosevelt's re-election in November, 1936, and reflected an ideological dissipation that eventually culminated in an organizational one.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

¹John Williamson, "Some Burning Problems of Organization," The Communist 9 (June, 1930), pp. 519-520

²Daniel J. Leab, "'United We Eat': The Creation and Organization of Unemployed Councils in 1930," Labor History VIII (Fall, 1967), pp. 306-307; Howe and Coser, p. 192; Bernstein, Lean Years, p. 427

³Williamson, p. 520

⁴Earl Browder, "Next Tasks of the Communist Party of the USA," The Communist 9 (Nove. Dec., 1930), p. 975

⁵Idem, "'Fewer High-Falutin' Phrases, More Simple Every-Day Deeds'--Lenin," Report of the Political Committee to the Twelfth Central Committee Plenum, CPUSA, November 22, 1930, The Communist 11 (January, 1931), p. 10

⁶Ibid., pp. 11-12

⁷Idem, "Next Tasks....," p. 974

⁸Idem, Report to the Twelfth Central Committee Plenum, pp. 15-16

⁹John Williamson, "The Party Nucleus--A Factor in the Class Struggle," The Communist 11 (May, 1931), p. 424

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 425-429

¹¹"Bertha Bazell," Oral History of the Tamiment Library, Tape #6, New York University, New York

¹²Jack Johnstone, "Planned Work, Concretization, and Practical Activity," The Communist 11 (July, 1931), p. 624

¹³Nelson, Barret, and Ruck, pp. 74, 75

¹⁴"Initiative of Workers Suggests New Forms of Organization," Party Organizer VI (February, 1933), pp. 21-22

- ¹⁵Nelson, Barret, and Ruck, pp. 76, 77, 78
 - ¹⁶Joe Brandt, "How Our Block Committees Work," Party Organizer V (May-June, 1932), pp. 39-41
 - ¹⁷"The Shop Paper--An Organ of Struggle," Party Organizer VI (February, 1933), p. 80
 - ¹⁸National Organization Department, Report Prepared for Eighth National Convention, April 2-8, 1934, Party Organizer VII (May-June, 1934), p. 11
 - ¹⁹"How To Develop Permanent and Intimate Contacts," Party Organizer VI (February, 1933, p. 11
 - ²⁰Stella Nowicki, "Back of the Yards," in Rank and File, edited by Alice and Staughton Lynd (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), pp. 85-86
 - ²¹Phil Frankfield, "The Work of Our Unit and Party Recruitment," Party Organizer VII (January, 1934), pp. 10-12
 - ²²I have based this formulation on the conceptual framework developed in a Demonstration Project conducted by the United Community Centers, a social agency in the East New York section of Brooklyn, from 1965 to 1968. The project was funded by the Federal Office of Juvenile Delinquency. Its director was the late Morris L. Eisenstein, formerly a Professor of Social Work at Atlanta University. Research Director for the project was Professor Fannie Eisenstein.
- The project was designed to redirect the behavior of teenagers who had either engaged in delinquent activity, or been in difficulty with community authorities. They were recruited into the Center's ongoing teen program, where, unidentified as potentially delinquent youth, they functioned as an integral part of a teen group which was racially mixed, and composed of both working-class and middle-class young people.
- Two purposes of the project were described as follows. To demonstrate that:
- "1. Positive directional change will be effected among delinquent and non-delinquent youth through intervention in their life experience and relationships by leadership consciously committed to a specific value orientation.
 - "2. Positive directional change will be achieved through re-directing conflict resolution around new goals and possibilities."

See: Proposal, Training Project: OJD 65234, submitted by United Community Centers, Brooklyn, New York, to Office of Juvenile Delinquency, April 22, 1966, p. 24

I was a staff member of that project from September 1, 1967, to September 1, 1968.

PART THREE

THE DISPERSAL OF RADICAL PRACTICE IN THE
POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY OF THE DEMOCRATIC
FRONT

CHAPTER EIGHT

DAY TO DAY PRACTICE DURING THE TRANSITION TO THE
AMERICAN POPULAR FRONT, 1932-1936

A radical movement, I have suggested in previous chapters, must be assessed on a number of levels. I proposed three key 'variables of practice', to be taken into account in any study of Communist deradicalization.

There are, first, the over-arching ideological content, and large-scale theoretical formulations of the movement. I am referring, here, to the basic concepts described in the radical paradigm: the materialist base of social change, the fundamental conflict of political and economic interest between owning and producing classes, legitimacy of force and violence, proletarian internationalism, ideological struggle and vanguard leadership as necessary elements of political practice.

Let me remind the reader that, as I stated in the first chapter, the paradigm may be an inaccurate and false description of reality. Indeed, the epistemological status of all the varying theories of political reality remains an open question. Radicals accept the truth value of their belief system, of course, as moderate socialists, liberals, and conservatives accept the truth value of theirs. But, for the purposes of this study, the validity of any of these ways

of viewing the political realm is besides the point. That question has to do with the problem of theoretical verification in the social sciences, a concern far beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Here, I am simply trying to elucidate a methodology for determining what, in the case of a Marxist party, constitutes radical political action. What I have suggested is that, in the appraisal of oppositionist movements, there are at least three levels on which the analysis of action must proceed. The first, and broadest, level concerns the overt ideological frame which the movement actively projects. This criteria is satisfied when the basic propositions of the radical paradigm are given clear and constant expression through organizational publications, such as newspapers and magazines; general slogans; the literature associated with specific programs or political campaigns; the content of cultural undertakings; or through whatever other means of political education/propaganda may be developed and brought into play. In the previous chapter, for example, I tried to show the ways in which the content of the Daily Worker continuously relied upon the ideas defined in the radical paradigm, even as the paper struggled to change its style and mode of approach to its desired audience.

The second level of analysis through which Marxist political action must be assessed refers to the specific programs, strategies, and tactics which are developed by organization and applied to the political environment directly. This middle variable of practice, strategy, or short-term program, tells us the least about possible deradicalization. For it will always shift in relation to the kaleidoscopic turns of immediate and external political circumstance.

The most solid ground for evaluation, therefore, remains the constant of ideological content.

The third level of practice which must be closely considered when thinking about the nature of a radical movement is the quality of its face to face contacts and daily struggles with the people whom it seeks to push forward to social change. This quality of struggle reflects a spectrum of actions which can move from the mechanical to the innovative, the manipulative to the open, the rigid to the flexible. Let me cite what may seem a trivial example of this characteristic, although the Party, as I pointed out in the last chapter, was quite aware of its seriousness. I refer to the experience of the interested worker who agrees to accompany his Communist friend to a Party affair and is suddenly set upon by a number of individual comrades to accept at least a half-dozen responsibilities, and to contribute to another half-dozen Party causes. This is a mechanical, unthinking, rigid approach to organization. That it was not behavior which the Party sought--although it was behavior which the Party constantly reproduced--is suggested by the way in which this kind of involvement with people was constantly criticized, and its destructive potential continually explained. Browder's Open Letter, for example, although precipitated by a Comintern resolution which was critical of the American Party, deepened the attack on mechanistic action, especially in regard to organization among factory workers.

Another example of the shift from mechanical to innovative modes of involvement is implicit, I believe, in the change in writing style and kinds of articles which began to appear in the Daily Worker in the second half of 1933, and referred to above. There was a newly

expressed concern with the kinds of topics, stories, columns, and uses of the vernacular to which American workers might be more likely to respond; and there was less blind imitation of the high-minded, but inevitably arid, subject-matter which the Comintern saw fit for proletarian consumption, and less parroting of the Comintern's stifling and overblown prose style.

Finally, many of the attempts at organization to be discussed in the following pages of this chapter, and surveyed in the chapter previous to this, reflect militants who, in the arena of immediate contact, were independent, creative, and thoughtful. They searched for original, straight-forward ways of giving direction to people, and winning trust. They illustrate a concept of practice which consciously attempted to avoid the rote and mechanical.

In these concluding chapters I will contend that, in general within the Party, the quality of day to day struggle, this third variable of practice, remained open and authentic during the first years of the American Popular Front. However, after November, 1936, the impact of rank and file militancy moved upward through a nationally derived ideological framework that became, as the 1930's wore on, increasingly liberal, and less Marxist in content. As militancy rose through the thinning ideological environment that evolved into the Democratic Front of the late nineteen-thirties, it lost efficacy, and underwent dissolution. Radical struggle and commitment, in other words, were deflated by processes of theoretical redirection and structural reorganization which were instituted through the national Party apparatus. And even if some among the rank and file Communist organizers were skeptical of the political wisdom of their vanguard,

they were nevertheless caught by the mesh of their own concepts of proletarian unity and discipline, which led them to restrain whatever doubts they might have had. It was either go along, or break with the Party. So the militants continued immersing themselves in their daily work, and left the development of ideological perspectives to leadership.

Ideological content remains the capstone of the whole complex formed by these three variables of practice. For, according to the model here offered, there must be present to everyday practice an open, clearly articulated system of ideas which, in one form or another, consistently expresses the proposition that the political and economic interests of capital and labor are fundamentally opposed. The absence of a rigorous ideology of class struggle logically implies deradicalization. For where such ideological content is publicly missing, then the 'essential content' of what makes a political movement radical--at least as that term is understood in the theoretical paradigm offered as the base of this study--is lost. I refer, in this idea of "the essential content of radicalism" to the movement's ability to look consciously beyond the moment: to its ability to bring before collective awareness the constructs of a class-conflict model of society, and to infuse immediate practice with the tension of the long-range goal.

In using the radical paradigm as conceptual guide, one comes to the judgement that the American Popular Front was transformed into a deradicalized political movement only after Roosevelt's re-election. For, in the months prior to the Democratic victory, the American Popular Front, whatever slippages occurred during the previous

year and a half, retained an ideological format which continuously projected the philosophy of class opposition. In the months following the 1936 landslide for Roosevelt, however, the structural and ideological contexts into which the Party set its day to day practice become notable for their lack of actions and propositions reflecting the principles of class conflict, internationalism, the legitimacy of force and violence, and the centrality of the struggle around consciousness to political activity. The paradigm, therefore, leads to the conclusion that, if the American Communist party became deradicalized, the turning point is the 1936 Presidential election, not the Seventh Comintern Congress.

The Popular Front promulgated a politics of coalition. It was an attempt to seek alliances with liberal and reformist groups in a common program of anti-fascism. But it was not inconsistent with independent political organization, anti-capitalist ideology, or open support of the long-range revolutionary goal. It is not, therefore, inherently synonymous with a politics of deradicalization.

The Popular Front was established as official policy of the Third International at its Seventh Congress. But the new, coalition strategy did not spring full blown from the heads of Comintern leadership in the few months prior. I have already indicated, in an earlier chapter, how, as far back as 1932, the Communists had begun their hesitant search for a less sectarian politics. In this chapter, I will first briefly review the path along which the American party's ideology, programs, and structures travelled from 1932 to 1936, on their way towards formal implementation of the Popular Front. My

major focus, however, will be on the new organizational forms, direct experiences, and spot methods of working, which the Communists developed in their daily practice in individual factories and neighborhoods in these years.

My goal is to lay a basis, in the following pages, for examining the manner in which these primary levels of practice were subject to change and redirection in the early months of 1937, when the national leadership, headed by Earl Browder, unleashed a policy of structural and ideological deradicalization. I hope to demonstrate how a deradicalized policy affected Communist practice in its most minute, intimate, and, some would say, significant arena, that of face to face contact, and day to day struggle. The present chapter will concentrate on the details of Communist program and practice from the Spring of 1932, up through the closing months of 1936. The next chapter will trace the modes of action through which deradicalization fully and finally settled over the American Communist party in the years of 1937 and 1938.

The events which led to the emergence of the Popular Front line were really set into motion in March, 1932. Hindenberg's massive electoral victory in Germany, along with the superior showing of the Nazi party over the Communist, alerted the International that all was not well with its Third Period program. Whether the success of German reaction was due, as the Communists insisted, to Social Democratic betrayal--a patently weak and self-contradictory explanation, since it left unresolved the crucial problem as to why the proletariat would choose Socialist leadership over Bolshevik--the working class was

clearly not acting in accord with Third Period theses and projections.

The Comintern began to soften its strategic stance almost immediately. Less than a month after the German elections it began offering support to Henri Barbusse's old notion of an anti-fascist alliance of the Left. Barbusse, a French Communist literary intellectual, had been consistently pushing this idea since 1928, and the Party had just as consistently treated it with a dismissive, though mild, scorn. Now, in April, 1932, the Comintern was helping Barbusse and Romain Rolland, another French leftist intellectual, to organize the first Congress Against War and Fascism. Socialists and pacifists and bourgeois nationalists were invited to attend this affair, and even some Trotskyists were able to get through the doors. It was still a matter of 'the united front from below', but, for the first time in years, generous things were said about non-Communist, progressive political doctrines and groupings.¹ Soon, national branches of this Congress were being set up around the world. The American League Against War and Fascism was begun in 1933. That it evolved into one of the largest and most influential organizations of the Popular Front, takes on special significance when one remembers that the origins of the League must be traced back to the middle of the Third Period.

April, 1932, witnessed as well, the Executive Committee of the Comintern advise the American Trade Union Unity League that, in essence, the labor organization's methods were too sectarian, rigid, and bureaucratic. The not unfriendly criticism was contained in an E.C.C.I. resolution entitled, "Lessons of the Strike Struggles

in the U.S.A." Shortly thereafter, the American Communists held their Fourteenth Plenum, the major slogan of which was "Towards Mass Revolutionary Work." The theme of the conference, taking its cues directly from the Comintern resolution, was that the Party was failing to attract and retain members because its methods of operation were too sectarian, rigid, and bureaucratic. In all fairness, it should be pointed out that the Plenum made no secret of the fact it was taking up this theme as a result of the ECCI criticism.²

In September, 1932, the ECCI issued another resolution, this one addressed to all members of the Red International of Labor Unions. It presented a change in line, arguing that it was time for the parties of world communism to consider "the question of work inside the reformist trade unions..."³ Thus, the policies that eventually came to define the Popular Front get their first hearings as early as 1932.

It is in 1933, however, that hints and feelers are turned into concrete political actions and decisions. On January 30, 1933, Hitler is appointed Chancellor. On February 27, the Reichstag is burnt down, and a young Dutch Communist, van der Lubbe, is arrested at the scene and charged with setting the fire. In Germany, it is now open season on Communists. The Comintern is forced into a direct re-examination of its heretofore unshakeable position on the 'imminent radicalization' of the masses. These are the first arrogant gropings for some kind of anti-fascist unity with Socialist leadership, that is, for a mild 'united front from above'.⁴ The Party continues, however, to place full blame for the German debacle, on the Socialists.

In America, in 1933, in line with the changes occurring in

the world movement, the Communists made a deep and serious search for new, but still militant, programs and strategies that might put an end to their general political isolation. In the summer, the Extraordinary Party Conference was held. Browder presented his Open Letter to the membership, which criticized the movement's abstract and rigid ways, and called for less mechanical, less dogmatic methods of organization. Such criticisms had been made before, of course, but never so directly, frankly, and publicly. "The growth of the A.F. of L.," Jack Stachel, the Party's national trade-union secretary, wrote in December, "...requires today more than ever that we give the greatest attention to work within the A.F. of L. unions."⁵ True, this was an extension of what had already become Comintern policy. But it is incorrect and distorting to ignore or disallow the impact of domestic politics on the Communists, especially in relation to the specific modes and structures they developed for implementing the international line.

The Communists were integrally involved with American labor, and, no matter what the extent of their commitment to a world, revolutionary organization, they were as strongly affected and influenced by what happened right around them as were any other group. They reacted in terms of an internationally formulated strategic framework, but they reacted. And 1933 gave them much to react to. It was an amazing year for the American labor movement. From 1925 to 1932, approximately 325,000 workers per year engaged in strikes. In 1933, however, "strikes and lockouts involved over 1,168,272." The United Mine Workers ended 1932 with 60,000 members, reports Joseph Rayback. By the middle of 1933, it had added 300,000. The United Textile Workers tripled in size, while one fourth of the Federation Unions

doubled their registers. The International Ladies Garment Workers' gained 100,000, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, 125,000. Oil workers built up an organization of more than 40,000. "In one year more than 1,700 Federal and local unions were organized in the automobile, steel, lumber and sawmill, rubber, and aluminum industries." John L. Lewis, head of the United Mine Workers, and Sidney Hillman, whose Amalgamated Clothing Workers had just affiliated with the A.F. of L., indicated they were ready to launch a new industrial union movement, and to organize the unorganized.⁶

If the Communists wanted to be a part of all this, it was clear they were going to have to make a major effort at helping to organize within the Federation. No direct or specific Comintern instructions were required for this shift, and none were forthcoming.

1933 was an outstanding year for the American labor movement. 1934 was an historic one. Certain years bear "a special quality in American labor history," writes Irving Bernstein. There occurred in these times "strikes and social upheavals of extraordinary importance, drama, and violence which ripped the cloak of civilized decorum from society, leaving exposed naked class conflict." 1934, according to Bernstein, was one of these years. There were 1856 work stoppages, involving close to one and one half million workers. Four of the strikes are described as social upheavals--"those of auto workers at the Electric Auto-Lite Company in Toledo, of truck drivers in Minneapolis, of longshoremen and then virtually the whole labor movement on the shores of San Francisco Bay, and of cotton textile-workers in New England and the South."⁷

The Communists were not about to permit themselves to be ex-

cluded from such labor explosiveness. They made themselves a part of this activity in every way they could. Up until the end of 1934, they not only increased their efforts in the A.F. of L., they sought to continue and maintain the Trade Union Unity League, and to involve themselves in the independent union movement as well.

...What we need is to build the red unions wherever we can and better than until now, but at the same time work among the A.F. of L. workers wherever they are organized. There can and should be no division of these tasks as to rank or importance...

...apart from the growth of the T.U.U.L. unions, side by side with the A.F. of L. unions, there is another important development... Aside from the railroad organizations outside the A.F. of L. (Brotherhoods) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, which just affiliated with the A.F. of L., there are some 150,000 workers who in the course of the last year and a half organized into independent unions...

...we must work in the independent unions and try to win them for our program... We must build our oppositions in these unions just as we do in the other reformist controlled unions. In those independent unions that base themselves on the class struggle we must build, not oppositions, but only the Communist fractions, just as we do in the T.U.U.L. unions.⁸

Here, in outline, is the over-all program of labor action which the Communists set for themselves in these pivotal years of American social development. The situation was literally forcing them to move towards a Popular Front concept.

As the American Communist party, between 1933 and 1935, tried to break from its sectarian shell, its front line militants continued their efforts at building a distinct, radical movement among American industrial workers. In order to convey a sense of the way in which the content and direction of daily struggle was a function of the

strategic vision of the national leadership, it will be helpful to cite some examples of the close methods practiced by Communist organizers in these years.

The structure of this, and the following chapter will obey a sort of back and forth logic. First I will describe the larger political programs and policies of the Party, and then look at the relation between these, and the character of the Party's practice with local constituencies. The interplay between theory and practice, in a Marxist-Leninist movement, will emerge in stark, empirical fashion.

In the remainder of this section, I will examine the nature and content of some of the Party's local activity in those years when, on the national level, it was first proposing to reach beyond itself. The next part of the chapter will seek to connect the Party's over-all direction, and its immediate organizing work, in the period which surrounded the formal introduction of the Popular Front. There will, of necessity, be some temporal overlap, for many different sorts of political trends were co-existing within the same time frame.

All Communist organizing, theoretically, had a dual focus. One was aimed at winning for the workers as many as possible of their immediate, or partial, demands. The other sought to use these small struggles as bases for pushing workers to question the capitalist system as a whole, and to begin to identify with the values and goals of socialism. Since every action had both an immediate and long range purpose, every decision a militant made, every behavior, every use of self meant something, one way or the other, in terms of advancing or retarding achievement of the socialist end. A single

opportunity missed, a single leaflet not given out, a single worker not contacted could mean that much less development in the growth of class consciousness. Who could tell whether the next worker spoken to would not be the one to support a campaign, and eventually join the Party? To the Communists, each moment contained within itself the potential for bringing the revolution closer.

It was this kind of duality of vision that, up until the dissolution of the Party's program in a general and vague progressivism, invested its day to day practice with a strongly felt intensity. The intensity was re-enforced all through the preparatory years of the Popular Front, when the Party, retaining its radical ideological framework, sought, at the same time, to win acceptance and coalition from socialists and liberals.

The militants' work, in this period, was meticulous. No stone of organization could be left unturned. In Dearborn, Michigan, for example, late in 1933, the problem was to recognize that one could not organize just in the Ford plants, or just in the neighborhoods where the auto workers lived. One had to do both. "Our agitation... has two sides," the Dearborn Communists wrote in the Party Organizer,

one the direct agitation in the plant itself, and secondly among the Ford workers not employed at the time in the shop but who are in hopes of being hired and who are employed for various periods from time to time.⁹

One extended oneself to the maximum. One looked to have as wide an impact as possible.

Leaflet and leaflet distribution were always problems for the Communists. Leaflets were essential in organizing work, because they were the major tool for communicating to people, immediately and

locally, an issue, a political position, a campaign, or a planned action. In the heyday of the Third Period, rank and file activists were never quite sure what to include, what to leave out, and how to make a brief, cogent argument. "A leaflet must stick to the subject," a 1931 article on leaflet writing had admonished. "Ramb- ing from the need for toilets in a certain shop, to the Chinese revolution is impermissible." The Communists learned early in their T.U.U.L experience that one could not pour the entire demands for the revolution into a leaflet built around immediate grievances. "A leaflet loses its value if it is full of slogans, even good ones, if they are meaningless to the workers. The slogans must be closely related and must form a logical conclusion to the text of the leaf- let."¹⁰

By the time the Third Period was beginning to wither, local Communists had started to pick up on these principles of leaflet writing. "At first we distributed long, large leaflets," wrote the Dearborn organizers, "but the reaction among the workers made it clear that short and concise leaflets had much greater effect. The most effective leaflets were those containing one idea around a special slogan." Their best leaflet, these militants felt, was one they had issued during a strike at the Briggs body shops in January, 1933.

The Ford plant, with no supply of car bodies, had been forced to shut down its assembly lines. "The leaflet raised the slogan of demanding pay for every day lost as a result of the closing..." The local Communists were pleased not only because the issue generated a positive response, but because the leaflet in which it had been

raised was small, $4\frac{1}{2}$ " by 6", and was easy to distribute in and around the shop. Of such technical details are good organizational campaigns made. The point is that the Communists were especially alert to them.

In addition to content, one had to worry all the time about this problem of distribution. It may have seemed to be a trivial and non-ideological concern, but if one could not reach the workers with one's slogans, one could not affect their systems of belief. The activists at Dearborn worked out a number of methods.

One is the bringing of rolls of toilet paper which contain leaflets rolled in them. In this way, quite a few leaflets get into the hands of the workers before the company gets wise.

There were other techniques for distributing the leaflets inside the plant. The assembly line itself was used.

...On the cylinder line the workers attached a leaflet which had been dampened with water to the warm core which passed along the line and was read by many workers before the foreman discovered it.

One Christmas, leaflets which could be folded into a small packet were run off, and Christmas seals wrapped around them. These were dropped on the floor in various departments throughout the factory.

Methods of distribution within the plant were as ingenious as the organizers could make them. There was, however, at least one agreed upon constant in all of this: "...the distribution inside the shop could not be very effective without considerable help from the outside."

Outside distribution was less of a problem, but it was still a problem. "Street cars stop on Ford property and the workers are compelled to walk over a viaduct into the plant." Any worker who

walked across the road which passed under the viaduct was immediately fired. The militants decided the workers had to be reached before they arrived at the plant, while they were still in automobiles and streetcars.

There were four main streetcar lines which converged on the factory.

...By stationing ourselves at the street car junction points we were able to carry on an effective distribution. We distributed the leaflets at a time when almost every one on the streetcar was a Ford worker. A bunch of leaflets were handed into the car and quickly found their way from hand to hand... We reached the workers who went to work by auto by waiting at stop streets near the Ford plant, and when the cars stopped we handed a leaflet to each occupant of the car.

The Communists may have held, somewhere in the back of their minds, the notion that, someday, they would be overthrowing the state. But, in the meantime, it was truly more important to know where to stand in order to give out a leaflet.¹¹

An organizer from Cleveland conveys this same sense of minute, never-ending grind, but from a slightly different perspective. Here, there was no group within the shop on which to build, and no sense of impending organization, as there was in automobile manufacture in 1933 and 1934. Her job was to organize a union in a concentration plant in the heavy metal industry. In June, 1934, she was assigned by her section committee to outside work on the plant. "From that time 'till now," she wrote almost a year later, "two comrades carried on the task of organizing the Section concentration plant, a Negro worker, Comrade Y., on the inside, and a white woman, Comrade Z., on the outside."

In this plant, Comrade Z. reported, the molders did not know

their own piece-rate, and were "never allowed to see their scrap." They could not check up on their wages, therefore, and could not raise them, no matter how fast their pace of work. The two Communists, one white, one black, one a woman, one a man, one on the outside, one on the inside, issued a leaflet on the unknown piece-rates. The rates were soon announced.

Leaflet distribution continued, with the aid of volunteers from another District. Talk of forming a union spread, and "workers seemed ready to organize, so we called a mass meeting." This turned out to be "an incorrect analysis." Spies attended the meeting, mass layoffs occurred and Y. lost his job. So the process had to begin all over again.

We carried on work outside. We identified and isolated for the workers two stool pigeons not known before. In repeatedly asking for his job back, Comrade Y finally succeeded in throwing off suspicion while resisting attempts to make him a stool pigeon.

The Section changed the plan. Instead of directly organizing a union in this concentration plant, a Party nucleus was to be set up first. This, it was felt, could serve as a safer and more secure base for later unionization.

After two months, Y was rehired back into the plant. He had spent his time as an unemployed worker seeking out potential members for the proposed nucleus. For another three months, he worked in the plant by himself. "Bosses and stool-pigeons watched him all the time." Yet he continued quietly to make contacts. He even managed to recruit a member for the nucleus.

Z., after five months away from this assignment, was allowed

to return. She and her partner went over the list of names he had compiled. They chose to recruit "on the basis of militancy and influence among the workers," selecting people from all three shifts and all departments. Z's job was to visit and talk with these people in their homes. Her appeal built logically and directly from the immediate problem, to the long-range socialist goal.

The line of approach used for the recruiting was: organization has begun in the plant; all workers are being protected against bosses and stool-pigeons by this outside contacting; the miserable conditions of the job, the class lines in the plant are shown. Conditions in the plant are then linked up with those in industry as a whole. The general economic conditions are then stated politically and the line of class struggle shown. The condition of workers in the Soviet Union, the results of the overthrow of capitalism, and the setting up of the dictatorship of the proletariat are contrasted with our conditions. We point out then what the worker himself can do about conditions here--join the CP and work to form strong class struggle organizations in the plant...

It should be recalled that the anonymous organizer, here, is working to build a Party nucleus. Out of this, it is projected, a metal trades union will come. If it were direct union organization, then, at this point in the Party's development--1934-1935--the references to proletarian dictatorship, and to joining the Communist party, would not have been the culmination of the appeal.

Approaching the workers was not accomplished in a single visit. "Often it takes several visits with literature." Sometimes Y and Z would decide that it was safe for them to visit together right away, sometimes Z would go by herself first, and Y would accompany her later. "We have never met antagonism," Z. wrote. "All are for a union that has a class struggle, equality of nationalities line." Eventually, they organized a unit of ten members, eight of whom worked

in the plant.¹²

One wonders what became of these two organizers, and their handful of recruits, as the years wore on. Where were they, for example, in the late thirties and early forties, when the steel industry finally became organized?

The day to day organizing, whatever the variance from situation to situation, had an underlying pattern. Reach the workers with an issue. Call on support from the larger community. Organize one's time to the fullest. And finally, rely upon every physical and mental reserve to accomplish one's goal.

Stella Nowicki, the organizer from the Chicago stockyards, summed up many of these themes. In her area, the Young Communist League and the Communist party unit met as a single group, since there were not enough local members to justify meeting separately. "We would have meetings and marches and classes on Marxism and Leninism." One of their responsibilities was to write articles for the shop paper, The Yards' Worker. For help, they turned to the college community. "We contacted young people who were at the University of Chicago, and they helped in editing and getting funds. They would help us in writing up material for leaflets and by distributing material at the stockyard gates. They would get up real early and be there at 6:00 or 6:30 in the morning."

Work began at 7 A.M. The students had to do the outside distribution, for, if the workers had done it, they would have been fired. And, as in the Ford plant in Dearborn, so in the stockyards of Chicago: devious methods had to be found to get leaflets inside the plants. "On the inside, we had to wear uniforms all the time and

any packages we carried in were examined," Nowicki recalls.

The only way we carried in these leaflets about organizing was in our underclothes, in our bras (the men too, in their pants). I would come in real busty. Then I'd go into the washroom and leave the papers around.¹³

It is possible that if there had not been the privacy of toilets, American workers would never have been organized. In a contemporary article, written in 1935, one Communist militant points out that arguments over policy were often carried out "on the walls of the shop forum--the toilet."¹⁴ Indeed, the woman's room on the factory floor played a key role in the climactic scene of Norma Rae, a 1970's Hollywood film about labor organizing in the South.

Stella Nowicki, assessing her experiences as a Communist organizer in the mid-thirties, tried to capture the essence of her work in those years. "When I look back now, I really think we had a lot of guts. But I didn't even stop to think about it." That, as the thirties progressed, the Party made socialism less and less of an immediate issue, did not, for Nowicki, undermine the duality and radical thrust of its practice. "About socialism, you didn't talk about socialism per se. You talked about issues and saw how people reacted. You talked about how one could attain these things."¹⁵

Pushing in the direction of socialism, without placing a demand for its implementation on the political agenda of the day was, after 1932, at the base of all Communist program and activity. But delaying the socialist goal, as long as a class conflict ideological model was in place, did not, as I have tried to demonstrate, dampen the intensity or deflect the content of face to face organizational struggle.

Major changes in the Party's structures of political practice were about to occur. Yet, whatever concrete shifts the early development of the Popular Front entailed, the fundamental notion of class struggle was retained.

- 2 -

The explosion of labor in 1933 and 1934 clearly indicated that American workers were not going to rely upon the Communist party as their vehicle of change. In its report to the Eighth Convention in April, 1934, the National Organization Department stated that the Party had more than tripled its membership since 1930--from 7,500 to well over 23,000. This represented a gain of 15,000 people. However, across the same period, 50,000 registrants had signed up. This meant that the Party had lost, over the course of these four years, 33,000 members. Twice as many had dropped as had stayed.

"The mass actions of the period under examination (1931-1934)," said the Report, "such as strike waves, unemployed struggles, Hunger March, Presidential election campaign, etc., insufficiently increased the recruitment into the Party." If the Party were to realize what it believed its potential to be, something had to change. "... (T)he Party units must be basically transformed from narrow, inner circles into live, political bodies, alert and sensitive to the needs of workers, discussing their grievances, and how the units can initiate, develop, and lead the struggles of the workers around these grievances."¹⁶ The Party, of course, had been telling itself this since 1932. But the growing excitement and charged political atmosphere which became manifest on the American left in 1933-1934 finally

forced the Communists to make programmatic and structural revisions.

Three major policy shifts were introduced. The first overturned the Party's existing concept of labor organization. The second altered what had been its fundamental political strategy since 1929. And the third began a process of ideological adulteration, by softening the content of the Party's oppositionist stance. None of these three changes, however, led the Party openly to abandon its long range goals of socialist revolution and the overthrow of capitalism. It cannot be demonstrated, in other words, that, from the end of 1934 through the end of 1936, the American Communist party became de-radicalized. The Party consciously attempted, in these beginning years of the Popular Front, to retain a framework of radical political practice.

One of the earliest concrete manifestations of the move towards the Popular Front came in the Fall of 1934, with the decision to abandon the Trade Union Unity League. The Communist-led unions were to be dismantled, and taken into the A.F. of L. "... (W)e are face to face with a new turn in the labor movement....," Jack Stachel told the Political Bureau that October, "a great growth of trade-union organization, taking primarily the channel of the A.F. of L." The T.U.U.L. unions had performed "a very positive role in the labor movement," Stachel said. Yet, he continued, "It is true...that with some notable exceptions, such as in the fur and other industries, we were unable to develop our unions into broad mass organizations of a stable character." This was a remarkable admission. But, given the tenor of the times, if the Communists were to remain effective at all in the American labor movement, they had no alternative other

than to recognize that, in an era when workers were joining unions in record numbers, their own labor organization was small and stagnant.

Tactically, there was only one possible conclusion.

...If we examine the basic industries of the country, all the industries where we never attempted to build new unions, and after this, the federal locals of rubber, aluminum, etc., we shall see that...the whole objective situation and development of the struggle demands that the Party establish its main policy today as one of work inside and building the opposition within the A.F. of L. unions...

...Large masses are moving, not yet tens of millions, but they are moving, for a number of reasons, mainly through the A.F. of L. Can our Party come forward and become a real mass Party, can we talk about winning the majority of the workers unless we are able to influence and win these workers in the first line of march...? To ask this question is to answer it. And does it not indicate that the line of policy must be to work where these masses are?¹⁷

The T.U.U.L. unions were dissolved quickly and efficiently. Early in 1935 the steel, auto, and needle trades unions of the League voted to affiliate with the A.F. of L. Where they could not affiliate as a body, members of the revolutionary unions dropped out, and joined the Federation unions as individuals. In March, the T.U.U.L. resolved itself into a Committee for the Unification of the Trade Unions. By the end of the summer, it had totally disbanded.¹⁸

A second arena where the Central Committee, in the year or so preceding the formal establishment of the Popular Front, offered a sharp change in its approach to practice, concerned political structure and strategy. Huge organizing territories, such as District 10, which covered Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah, more than

one-third of the area of the United States, were broken down. This was to allow closer contact and supervision between the District organizers and the rank and file units. In addition, the districts and sections were restructured so as to parallel state, congressional, and municipal electoral districts and wards. The Party was preparing to plunge itself into American politics in a new way.¹⁹

A more fundamental and determining alteration in political strategy occurred sometime in the winter of 1934-1935, when the Party decided to go ahead and support a Labor party. "...(T)he C.P. must change its negative position towards the Labor Party question," a resolution of the Central Committee announced in January, 1935. American Communism, according to the resolution,

Should declare its support for the movement for a Labor Party and fight in this movement for the policy of the class struggle, resisting all attempts to bring the movement under the control of social-reformism...²⁰

In February, in a speech at St. Nicholas Palace in New York, Browder undertook to publicize the Party's new attitude towards the concept of an independent Labor party. The Communists, he granted, had been opposed to such a radical coalition movement since 1929, but he went on, events in 1934 had placed the question 'in a new light'.

Mass disintegration of the old two party system had begun. A new mass party to the left of and in opposition to Roosevelt will in all probability occupy the foreground of the 1936 election.

A clearly defined Labor party movement did not yet exist, Browder explained, "only the beginning of a mass breakaway, within which a struggle is going on between two class forces."

The class forces at war within the Democratic party, according

to Communist analysis, were slowly tearing it asunder. On the one hand were those who would stop at nothing to prevent the Labor party movement from "going beyond the limits of the fundamental interests of monopoly capital, of profits and private property in the means of production." On the other hand, there were those, like the Communists and some other militant progressives, one supposes, "who would throw this movement into the struggle against capital, for the preservation and improvement of living standards at the cost of profits..." The Labor party was to be the Communists' first major foray into national political coalition since the beginning of the Third Period. But it was still openly conceived as an anti-capitalist coalition.²¹

A third change in Party policy, was the new ideological line it introduced, fittingly enough, on July 4, 1935. The rhetoric of revolution was projected by the Communists on that day, but it was the rhetoric of the American revolution, not the Bolshevik. Class struggle is not so much the issue as are the ideals of Thomas Jefferson, and "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Here is the first sharp turn, in the party's literature and press, away from notions of class conflict, and the incompatibility of capital and labor.

On this American Independence Day, a month prior to the Seventh Comintern Congress, the Daily Worker published a special July 4th issue commemorating the American Revolution and its heroes. Across the top of the front page there was spread the following slogan: 'WHICH ROAD--SHALL IT BE VOLUNTARY SLAVERY OR REVOLUTION?' And beneath, in a special box, sat the passage from the American Declara-

tion of Independence in which that slogan could first be found. Inside, the Declaration was reprinted in its entirety, a picture of Thomas Jefferson to its right, one of Lenin, to its left.

There was a long essay on the role of Thomas Jefferson in the early days of the Republic. His support of agrarian democracy was portrayed as the radicalism of its time. "Both the Shays rebellion in 1786 and the Whisky rebellion were serious threats to the government," the article informed its readers.

Yet, what did Jefferson say of Shay's revolt? Writing to his friend, Mrs. John Adams, he said: 'God forbid we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion... What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that the people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms...

The article went on to discuss other revolutionary heroes, such as Tom Paine, John Adams, and Patrick Henry. It was one of several pieces, that day, which attempted to link the revolutionary traditions of 1776 with the revolutionary aspirations of the American section of the Third International. The Communist party, read one of the Independence Day articles, was the only existing Party which "relentlessly fights against the Benedict Arnold Americanism of Hearst and his class." The writer cited the words of Earl Browder, General-Secretary of the Communist party of the United States: "We Communists claim the revolutionary traditions of Americanism... We are the Americans, and Communism is the Americanism, of the 20th century."

The Americanization, if one might call it that, continued apace. A little over a year later, in September, 1936, the Daily Worker introduced a new masthead. The hammer and sickle, symbol

of labor, of the unity of worker and peasant, which had stood proudly at the center of the head, between Daily and Worker in the title, disappeared. Beneath this banner, there had run, since the paper's inception, the following subtitle: 'Central Organ, Communist Party, U.S.A. (Section of the Communist International)'. Someone must have believed that such emphasis on international relationships had no place in a Party which claimed to be the embodiment of twentieth century Americanism. And so, along with the hammer and sickle, the internationalist slogan beneath the masthead disappeared, and was replaced by a new identifying description. The paper was no longer the Daily Worker. It was the New York Daily Worker, 'People's Champion of Liberty, Progress, Peace, and Prosperity'.²³

While each of these changes eventually made the shift to a deradicalized politics easier and more gradual, they carefully skirted the line between a radical and reformist policy, without actually crossing it. For the dissolution of the T.U.U.L., the reorganization of the Party into structural forms compatible with American electoral politics, and the search for broad, left-wing, political alliances, such as the development of a Labor party, were all carried out within the framework of the two essential attributes of a radical politics. First, the goal of revolutionary class struggle was kept as a defining component of Party program up through the elections of November, 1936. And, secondly, independent centers of Communist activity, that is, the Party fractions, were retained in whatever association the Communists joined, whether it was an A.F. of L. union, a progressive political coalition, or one of their own mass organizations, such as the League Against War and Fascism. This meant that

Communists on local levels still had their own operational bases out of which to initiate action, and were still attached to a working radical ideology.

The January, 1935, resolution of the Central Committee, 'On the Main Immediate Tasks of the C.P.U.S.A.', insisted upon these aspects of the Popular Front. In connection with the labor movement question, for example, and "the transfer of the chief attention to the work in the A.F. of L.," the Central Committee pointed out that, "...the Communist fraction becomes of decisive importance...

Without strong and well organized fractions, the Communist Party cannot carry out the necessary flexible tactic and carry out its revolutionary line. Carrying out decisions through fractions, the Party organizations must act through convincing the members of the Party who work in the trade unions, by means of help and example, thus forming and strengthening internal discipline.

Abandonment or loosening of fraction work becomes tantamount to the abandonment of struggle for the revolutionary line itself. This is especially true within the framework of a tactic of coalition.

A similar logic was followed in the outline of ideas and structure which were to characterize the newly proposed Labor party. The language describing the policy is flat, enervating, repetitive. It gives almost tangible credence to the charge that Communist leadership were incapable of either original thought or innovative style. But the basics of a radical practice--class struggle opposition to reform, and the maintenance of independent organization as the essential mode of political action--were present and articulate.

...the Communists enter the movement for the Labor Party only with the purpose of helping the masses to break away from the bourgeois and social-reformist parties, and to find the path to the revolutionary class struggle...

The struggle for the political leadership of the masses who are now breaking away from the Democratic and Republican Parties depends at all its stages on the constant growth and strengthening of the C.P. as an independent revolutionary force, for which purpose it is necessary to popularize the Party program to ever broader masses.

At this point in the history of the American Communist party, the first part of 1935, the essential elements of the radical paradigm were publicly reflected in its ideology and program.

There remains the problem of the ideological campaign introduced by the Party later that Spring--'Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism'. Did this campaign indicate the onset of de-radicalization? What are the ways for proposing answers to such a question?

Clearly, the campaign reflects the beginning of some sort of ideological debasement. This new Americanism, according to one of the articles describing it,

basing itself on the right of revolution embodied in the Declaration of Independence, and learning from the example of the revolutionary fathers who took to arms to win their freedom, declares that only by overthrowing the government of Wall Street, only by driving out the tyrants and Tories and Benedict Arnolds of today can the American people win real freedom, lasting peace, and prosperity.

Today, 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' are possible only under the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is the broadest and freest democracy in the world for the masses of the people...

The Communist Party calls on the working masses of the entire country to honor the revolutionary traditions of July 4th by closing ranks and marching forward in the fight for their most vital economic needs, for the defense of their civil rights, against war and fascism...25

There is an incongruity in reading that 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' are possible, in the modern world, only under

proletarian dictatorship. For these are not the ends which proletarian dictatorship seeks, given the close attachment of this classic political sentiment to the concepts of a liberal order. 'Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' are historically identified with the rights of private ownership and economic advancement on the basis of individual merit, rather than that of assigned social status.

What rings curious and hollow, here, is not the attempt itself to link the call for proletarian revolution back to radical traditions stemming from the growth of an independent, national bourgeoisie. Marxism had always found a conceptual connection between the bourgeois revolutions of early, mercantile capitalism, and the proletarian revolutions it projected for advanced, industrial societies. Antonio Gramsci, languishing in a Fascist prison cell, had turned to both Machiavelli and the French Jacobins in order to gain theoretical clarity for Marxism around the nature of radical leadership.²⁶ And the struggles of the settler, the indentured servant, the poor farmer, the slave and the freedman, the immigrant, the laborer, for economic security and political freedom were themes of American history with which the Communists had always been comfortable. It is easy to show, however, that the American party, in seeking to appropriate bourgeois revolutionary ideas, relied, in the main, upon bland and misleading analogies. The Communists, for example, were fond of citing Thomas Jefferson as one of their spiritual forbearers, and historical defender of the interests of the common man. But the revolution sought by American Communism was based on an entirely different set of beliefs and values than those espoused by Thomas Jefferson. The Federalists and Jeffersonians, whatever their differences, all looked back to the

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English revolution, and to the liberal individualism of John Locke and Adam Smith. The American Communists linked their traditions and experience to the Russian Bolshevik revolution of 1918, and the collectivist theories of human nature of nineteenth century socialism.

If the Party leaders had been interested in promoting an honest and sound examination of Marxist ideas, if they had been concerned with any kind of ideological clarity, rather than with just rushing to identify with American historical traditions, they would not have blurred over such crucial theoretical distinctions. Their efforts in this area were vague, misleading, and, one is led to conclude, deliberately manipulative. Did the Communists truly believe that the introduction of new, transparent, pseudo-patriotic slogans would suddenly win them the hearts and minds of the American working class?

Nevertheless, when all is said and done, the charges of manipulation and opportunist dissembling are not the same as a finding of deradicalization. For example, the notions of capitalist exploitation, and the fundamental opposition of political-economic classes, remained prominent in the Party's ideological arsenal. The slogans associated with the new campaign--'for the vital economic needs of the workers', 'for the defense of civil rights and liberties', 'against war and fascism'--are fully compatible with a class struggle program. And Communism's new mode of 'Americanism' continued to look forward to, and urge, the eventual overthrow of the state. There was a flirtation with reformist ideology here, but, as of yet, no movement into the bedroom.

What can be said is that the new campaign helped lay the

groundwork for a deradicalization to come. It created an atmosphere in which the transition to a politics of capitalist acceptance would be gradual and difficult to pin-point. But, over-all, the Party's political direction, in the twelve-month periods, roughly, extending to either side of the formal introduction of the Popular Front, was played out within the context of an ideological and structural framework which held to the basic components of a radical practice.

It is during the Presidential election campaign of 1936 that the Party's ideology and program came as close as possible to a reformist politics, without actually crossing the line. Or one might put it differently and argue that the Party was attempting to move in two directions at once. It really does not matter. Empirically, the Party abandoned its stance of resolute opposition to social-democratic and liberal movements, and at the same time, continued to insist upon socialist revolution as the only solution to the economic dislocations associated with capitalism.

Significantly, the Party's position, here, borrowed in a direct, almost mechanical fashion from the Popular Front strategy which had been developed and proposed by Dimitroff in his major address to the Seventh Comintern Congress. This strategy stayed within the bounds of a kind of populist anti-capitalism, and deliberately refrained from making the destruction of capitalism per se the goal of action. But it is also important to note that, even as the Communist parties were being directed to seek programmatic unity with socialists and liberals, the formal resolutions of the Congress insisted on the continuance of independent radical orga-

nization and ideology. "We are adherents of Soviet democracy, the democracy of the toilers, the most consistent democracy in the world," Dimitroff proclaimed.

But in the capitalist countries we defend and shall continue to defend every inch of bourgeois-democratic liberties, which are being attacked by fascism and bourgeois reaction, because the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat so dictate.

These propositions permitted the Communist parties of the world to develop and support reformist political platforms. On the other hand, they were not to drop the Marxist-Leninist perspective. "Communists," Dimitroff warned his audience, "cannot and must not for a moment abandon their own independent work of Communist education, organization, and mobilization of the masses."²⁷

Revolutionary themes run throughout Dimitroff's outline of the Popular Front, even as the strategy of coalition is being projected to the fullest. For example, members of the International were now instructed to support united front governments, that is, governments in which the Communists would share power with socialist and liberal parties. "If we Communists are asked...whether we are prepared to share the responsibility even when it will be a question of forming a government on the basis of the united front," Dimitroff informed the Comintern,

then we say with a full sense of our responsibility: Yes, we recognize that a situation may arise in which the formation of a government of the proletarian united front, or of an anti-fascist People's Front, will become...necessary in the interests of the proletariat.

But a united front government, Dimitroff stated, should never be thought of as an end in itself, should never command the basic political allegiance of a revolutionary.

Final salvation this government cannot bring. It is not in a position to overthrow the class rule of the exploiters, and for this reason cannot finally remove the danger of fascist counter-revolution. Consequently it is necessary to prepare for the socialist revolution!

The search for unity of action with socialists did not logically imply the abandonment of revolutionary ideology. According to the final Resolution of the Congress, the united front charged

every communist party to wage an irreconcilable struggle against any tendency to gloss over the differences in principle between communism and reformism, against weakening the criticism of social democracy... against the illusion that it is possible to bring about socialism by legal, peaceful methods, against any reliance on automatism or spontaneity..., against belittling the role of the party, and against the slightest vacillation at the moment of decision.

To ally with socialists around immediate issues was not, in the formal conceptualization of the Popular Front, to forego differences around either fundamental assumptions, or practical notions of how to eliminate capitalism. A class conflict model of society and social change was openly retained.²⁸

Browder did his best during the 1936 Presidential campaign to keep the turnings of the American party on keel with the intricacies of the Comintern outline of the Popular Front. In late Spring, as the Presidential contest was getting under way, the Communists simply dropped their notion of a Labor party, which had been anti-capitalist in concept, and joined the movement for a Farmer-Labor party. The new organization did not oppose itself to capitalism.

Browder presented the goals of the restructured policy at the Communists' Ninth Convention, in June, 1936. The program of the Farmer-Labor party demanded higher living standards for workers through the practice of 'militant industrial unionism'. It sought

to expand social and labor legislation, and to balance the budget 'at the expense of the rich'. It called for the extension of democratic rights and civil liberties, and made a plea "to keep America out of war by keeping war out of the world." As Browder pointed out,

This is not a program of revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. It can be realized within the framework of the present economic system by a people's government backed by the organized masses...

The Communist party was supporting a reformist movement. For the first time, it was seeking to participate within the full mainstream of American electoral politics.

The Farmer-Labor party in 1936 will concentrate on state and Congressional elections, in an effort to send a bloc of real people's Congressmen to Washington, to fight for the fundamental program of progress.

The party's actions were fully consistent with the line of Dimitroff's argument.

The Communists' biggest headache came from the question of their stance in relation to Roosevelt. They did not want to ally with him, since they were still hoping for the emergence of an independent political movement to his left. But, given the commitment of the CIO, and its supporting groups, to the Democratic party, the Communists knew they could not break with Roosevelt, either. "It had long been the hope of our Party that we would be able to go into the Presidential elections this year with a Farmer-Labor national ticket," Browder told the June convention.

Already in May it had become clear that this was impossible. The great majority of organizations composing the Farmer-Labor movement, while breaking with the old parties, had decided to follow the policy of the big progressive unions of the Committee for Industrial Organization, in supporting Roosevelt for re-election.

The Communist Party declared that it seriously disagreed with this policy of dependence upon Roosevelt... We are, (however,) fully prepared to continue and develop our united front relations with those who support Roosevelt, reserving our disagreement on this question.

The Party, it was clear, could not repudiate Roosevelt without severing its connections to the progressive left. And one can be sure that the Communists were not about to risk losing the hard fought positions they had already attained within the chambers of the newly emerging CIO.²⁹

Faced with these ambiguities and dilemmas of the practical politics of the time, the Communists fielded Browder as their own Presidential candidate. But Browder made it clear that he was not running against Roosevelt--only Landon. We sharply differentiate between Landon and Roosevelt, Browder said,

declare that Landon is the chief enemy, direct our main fire against him, do everything possible to shift masses away from voting for him, even though we cannot win their votes for the Communist Party, even though the result is that they vote for Roosevelt.³⁰

Thus, the Communists compromised. They would neither support nor oppose.

Both Communists and non-Communists invariably raised the question as to why the Party insisted on what seemed a false neutrality. Browder's answers rejected this formulation, and suggested that, by following this course, the Party was attempting to maintain an ideologically distinct socialist role for itself. This was not a policy of the 'lesser evil', Browder told the convention. We Communists, he said, criticize Roosevelt's "surrenders to reaction, and the many points in which he fully agrees with reaction...

...We must declare Roosevelt's policies as not socialism, nor a step to socialism. He at most tries to smooth out some of the worst abuses of capitalism, in order to give it a longer life...31

The Party, as it moved, under the strategy of the Popular Front, towards organizational alliance with liberal democracy, did not want to drop its public association with the idea of socialism. Its indirect support of Roosevelt was not an example of political hypocrisy, but an effort, in a field of difficult choices, to build a Popular Front with a militant socialist component.

The Party even kept open, during the 1936 campaign, its long-range commitment to the revolutionary abolishment of capitalism. "We Communists," Browder said to his audience,

throwing our lot in with the Farmer-Labor Party movement, agree to fight for the road of progress under capitalism, together with those who are not adherents of socialism as we are; while at the same time we point out that the only final guarantee of progress is to abolish capitalism and move to socialism.

Thus, we conclude that the direct issue of the 1936 elections is not socialism or capitalism, but rather democracy or fascism. At the same time we emphasize, and will always emphasize, that a consistent struggle for democracy leads inevitably, and in the not distant future, to the socialist revolution.32

The People's Front idea did not represent a necessary break with the projection of a radical ideology. The Communists may have framed the issue of the 1936 election as democracy versus fascism, but they retained their separate organizational identity, their agitational program for the socialist goal, and their notion of the basic opposition of labor and capital

In the chapter's final section, I will examine the impact which this ideological framework had on the daily and immediate

practice of the period.

- 3 -

In terms of day to day organization and activity, 1936 was perhaps the most successful and rewarding year the American Communists ever had. For, during this year, they came as close as they ever would to the best of both worlds. On the one hand, they organized and supported united front alliances, and were welcomed as partners into the great labor struggles of the time; while, on the other, they held to a class conflict ideology, and kept their independent political bases in communities and union locals. They worked as open Communist militants with more people, around more issues, than ever before. A brief survey of some of their work in neighborhoods and unions illustrates the point.

Their new street branches allowed the Communists to become actively absorbed into the full panoply of neighborhood social and political life, deepening the community organization aspects of their practice. The branches moved to involve themselves in the question of housing, for example. In one New York assembly district, wrote Israel Amter in the May, 1936 issue of The Communist, "A member... made it his business to examine the infringements upon a law that recently went into effect, namely, the Multiple Dwelling Law." The ordinance had been passed to force landlords of old-law tenements to renovate them, and bring them up to modern standards of safety and sanitation. "As a result of that examination," Amter continued, "we found there are 67 houses on record within a radius of only a few blocks where struggles can be organized for the enforcement of this

law." While the Communists had always been concerned with housing conditions as an organizing issue, what made this campaign so intriguing was that it was to be based on the recent restructuring of the New York party to coincide with state electoral districts.³³

The Communists' united front structure gave them the ability to work closely with a wide variety of community organizations. Thus, officials from a neighborhood branch in upper Manhattan found themselves invited to an area conference of a local community federation, the West Side Council of Action. They used the opportunity to reach out to as many neighborhood associations as possible. "A thorough canvass of every mass organization in the branch district was made and first steps taken to see that our comrades are represented in each one of any importance." The branch made plans to open a neighborhood center which would "act as a lever...to raise the political and class consciousness" of community residents. It would offer a wide array of services, a bookshop, a game and reading room, restaurant, dramatic and moving pictures. "Our...bulletin will be a real neighborhood workers' newspaper with announcements of neighborhood births, marriages, engagements, etc., besides articles on neighborhood conditions, problems, issues, etc." One cannot know how far off the ground these particular Communists got with their plans. The point, however, is that this was a time when the Party was actively moving out into communities and organizations under its own name and banner, and was achieving, through the Popular Front strategy, some acceptance by liberal groups.³⁴

Many of the campaigns put together by local Communist groups in these years aimed specifically at organizing women in the community.

Alice Udrew, for example, was a Communist volunteer who was also president of her Parents' Association. "Parent Associations can provide an important mass base for our Party," she wrote.

We can easily reach and win over these impoverished working class and middle-class people by being in the forefront of struggles around issues of such vital importance as relief for needy children, medical and dental care, school construction, reduction of oversized classes, issues of war and fascism...

Barring the reference to war and fascism, such a list of concerns would not be out of place in a parents' group working in the urban neighborhood of today. One might find a campaign for a nuclear freeze in its stead, however.

The Parents' Association of which Alice Udrew was President mounted a drive to have the city put up traffic lights at busy intersections near the neighborhood schools. "Immediately after, we took up the need for a branch library and again I was elected and nominated as chairman of this committee." This work involved finding and proposing a city owned site, and generating "a mass movement to obtain funds for the building through the Board of Estimate." Again, what is notable around the Party's practice, here, is its insightful use of local government institutions and structures to further the fight for its program and ideas on the community level.³⁵

In cities across the country, the Party took as one of its major aims the formation of united front neighborhood committees. In New York, it reported,

The committees now include in their program the betterment of neighborhood schools, the abolition of military training in the neighborhood schools, day nurseries and free birth control clinics. Mothers in the neighborhoods are working to extend the number of day nurseries supported by WPA funds; to have day camps set up in the city parks for the summer months for their children...

In Detroit, similar work is conducted against high milk prices. In Boston, the women organized and won lower gas rates.

In these kinds of activities, the Communists worked with PTA's, mother's clubs, settlement houses, church groups, fraternal clubs, political clubs, Negro women's organizations, trade unions and women's auxiliaries, women's councils, and public schools. To the Communist understanding, the individual became a social force only through organized collective action. They believed, therefore, that every organizational attachment made, offered them the possibility of affecting social change.

The new Popular Front attitude led the Communists consciously to play down any special initiating or leadership role for themselves and their branches in the coalition groups which they joined. Communist arrogance, as Browder called it, had always been counter-productive when working with others around a common program, and the Communists now made a concerned effort to modify it. At the same time, however, they fought to maintain a distinct political identity for themselves. This aspect of their behavior in the '35-'36 period is important, because, directly after Roosevelt's election, they began to submerge themselves organizationally into the Popular Front. Thus, in the 1936 elections, Alice Udrew ran for local office on the Communist ticket.

This move has given the Party more prestige in this neighborhood, actually strengthening my position as a Communist candidate. In spite of the fact that many of these women are of other political affiliations, they have openly expressed their pride and admiration on the basis that a mother and an active worker whom they know is running for public office.³⁷

Udrew's evaluation of the response of her non-Communist colleagues was perhaps colored by some wishful thinking. However, the crucial fact, here, is that she was taking independent political action as a Communist. In 1938, if she were still in the Party, she would most likely have been a registered Democrat, or, at best, since this was New York city, on the rolls of the American Labor party. For, by that time, as I will show in the next chapter, fractions in the unions and mass organizations had been abolished, and an independent Communist politics, with variations depending upon the Party's local electoral strategies, dissolved in a great gesture of solidarity with the Democrats and their allies.

Still, in the months prior to Roosevelt's overwhelming 1936 victory, the Communists not only fought to maintain a separate, organizational presence in their community and electoral activity, but in their work in the labor movement as well. For example, throughout the strike at Goodyear's Akron, Ohio plant, called in the bitter February cold of that year, the Communists, while giving full support to the rubber worker's union, remained an independent organizational unit, with their own proposals, directions and strategies.

Fourteen thousand men had walked out over the lay-off of 70 workers, and the threat of Goodyear to re-introduce the eight hour day. The strike was to prove to be one of the first great confrontations in the CIO organizing drive. John Williamson, district

organizer for the Party in Ohio, came to Akron from his headquarters in Cleveland. After the first twelve hours of picket duty, he and another organizer, Jim Keller, met with a half-dozen Party members who were active in the strike. This group put together a program of demands, and issued it as a leaflet in the name of the Communist party. The leaflet called for the six hour day; no layoffs; no wage-cuts; a wage increase of 10% over the base rate; the end of speed-up, and a signed agreement. "This leaflet," Williamson wrote in his autobiography, "was on the picket lines and in the Goodrich, Firestone, and General factories by five o'clock that day." That evening, the picket captains met, and "unanimously endorsed and adopted as their own all the demands in the party leaflet."³⁸

Another instance in which the Communists took action independently of the United Rubber Workers' leadership had to do with the appearance of Assistant Secretary of Labor Edward F. McGrady. McGrady had been sent to Akron by Roosevelt, as a representative of the administration. The Labor Secretary spent two days in Akron mediating, and recommended, just before his return to Washington, that the strikers go back to work, and submit the issues to an arbitration committee. The union leaders presented the proposal to an armory meeting of 4,000 workers, where, the record shows, the gathering refused even to move it to a vote. The militants on the picket line, Williams reported in a contemporary article in The Communist, "marched into that union hall after listening to the Communist Party County Organizer over the radio and shouted down every proposal to accept the McGrady plan made by the leadership. As a result, all plans to vote on it were abandoned."

One is entitled to some skepticism as to how decisive a Commu-

nist radio program was to the outcome of that meeting; the rank and file were in a militant and angry mood regardless, and the atmosphere throughout the huge hall seems to have been one of almost unanimous opposition. But the issue is not how great or small was the actual influence of the Communists in these labor battles. The point to recognize is that the Communists were still prepared, in 1936, to promulgate a separate and independent line, and carry out independent actions--such as distribution of their own leaflets, organization of their own picket captains, and advocacy of specific union political positions on radio broadcasts. The Party operated as an organized body, Williamson told the readers of The Communist. "We thus transmitted the Party line through these strikers, through the progressive sector of the organized labor movement, into a power..."³⁹ In the following chapter, I will compare the kind of role the Party played during the rubber strike at Akron, with the one it played during the historic sit-down strike at the Fisher Auto Body plant in Flint, Michigan, which began on December, 30, 1936. It will prove an instructive comparison.

As Communist organizers in factories, neighborhoods, and communities worked around immediate grievances and specific issues, from which they hoped to build liberal alliances and popular fronts, the Party provided an ideological atmosphere that charged discrete and elemental effort with an over-all radical philosophy and political direction. As progressives, these organizers could participate fully in the campaigns and demands of the moment; as Communists, they could push for a distinct radical program within the whole range of

their day to day activities.

After Roosevelt's re-election, there is a noticeable change. Notions of capitalist exploitation, and the fundamental opposition of political-economic classes, begin to waver and disappear from the American party's presentation of the Popular Front line. The formal, overt practice of the national organization becomes, across the years 1937 and 1938, indistinguishable from a kind of militant populism. The Party operated with an ideology that saw socialism as some sort of vague, distant utopia, whose values and assumptions had no relevance to the problems of the day. Politically, it sought to portray itself as the advance, left-wing guard of the Democratic party. Organizationally, it disbanded the only structures it had to keep independent political action alive, its fractions and caucuses in progressive parties, mass movements, and labor unions.

A deradicalized ideology and practice were allowed to seep into, and undermine, the theoretical and structural components which were essential, in light of the basic paradigm guiding conceptual judgement throughout this study, to the Party's character as a movement of radical struggle. The following chapter traces and describes the process by which this occurred.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

¹See, for example, Nathaniel Buchwald's analysis of the Congress, "What Happened at the World Anti-War Meet in Amsterdam", Daily Worker, 17 September 1932, p. 4.

For Barbusse's 1928 call for an anti-fascist alliance of the Left, see the DW, 28 September, 1928, p. 4. For the Party's Third Period reaction and response to Barbusse's rather open literary and political philosophy--he sought what the Worker critic called a 'united literary front with the best of bourgeois writers'--See the DW, 22 December, 1928, p. 6, "Barbusse's New Journal, 'Monde'--Tendency of United Front with Bourgeois Writers Hurts Proletarian Aims," by Sol Auerbach. Barbusse, whose writings and ideas appeared in the Moscow journal, 'Culture and Revolution', dared publish in his own literary magazine such people as Romain Rolland, Upton Sinclair, Miguel DeUnamuno, Rabandraith Tagore.

For the Party's final assessment of Barbusse, see the obituary which appeared in the DW, 8 March, 1935, p. 2. Barbusse died in Moscow.

²For prior reference to both "Lessons of the Strike Struggles...", and to the Fourteenth Plenum, See Chapter Four, pp. 158-159, notes 19 and 20, respectively. See also, "The Imperialist Offensive and the Fourteenth Plenum of the Central Committee," in The Communist 12 (June, 1932): 483-495. "...in the Party work there has developed a dangerously formal and sectarian approach to all questions that lays a deadening hand upon the whole work of the Party." (p. 487).

³Cited by Cochran, Labor and Communism, p. 72.

⁴For a narrative of the immediate events leading to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, and what followed, see Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945. (New York: Viking Press, 1975), pp. 146-151. See also, Chapter Four, p. 166, note 25.

For the change in Comintern policy after Hitler became Chancellor, see "ECCI Statement on the German Situation and on the United Front," in Jane Degras, ed., The Communist International, 1919-1945 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956) vol. 3, pp. 248-254. See Chapter Four here as well, pp. 166-167, notes 26 and 27.

⁵Jack Stachel, "Recent Developments in the Trade Union Movement," in The Communist 13 (December, 1933), p. 1163.

⁶James R. Green, World of the Worker, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), p. 143; Joseph G. Rayback, A History of American Labor, (New York: Free Press, 1966), pp. 328-329; Bernstein, Turbulent Years, Ch. 2.

⁷Bernstein, p. 217.

⁸Stachel, pp. 1163, 1165, 1167.

⁹Max Salzman, "Methods of Mass Agitation Among the Ford Workers, Party Organizer VII (January, 1934): p. 19.

¹⁰"The Party Leaflet--Its Policy and Construction," Party Organizer IV (June, 1931): p. 14.

¹¹Salzman, "Methods of Mass Agitation..." pp. 19-20.

¹²D.W.S., "Report on Organization of Party Nucleus in Section Concentration Plant," Party Organizer VIII (April, 1935): pp. 15-17.

¹³Stella Nowicki, "Back of the Yards" in Alice and Staughton Lynds, eds., Rank and File (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), p. 76.

¹⁴Barbara Rand, "The Life Story of a Communist Party Shop Unit," Party Organizer VIII (May, 1935): p. 10.

¹⁵Nowicki, pp. 76, 85.

¹⁶See Report of National Organization Department, Prepared for Eighth National Convention, April 2-8, 1934, "Facts and Material on Organizational Status, Problems, and Organizational Tasks of the Party," Party Organizer VII (May-June, 1934): pp. 5-18.

¹⁷Jack Stachel, "Our Trade Union Policy," The Communist 14 (November, 1934): pp. 1093, 1096, 1101.

¹⁸William Z. Foster, "Breakthrough in Industrial Organization," Political Affairs XLVIII (Sept.-Oct., 1969): pp. 67-68.

¹⁹See the "Report of the National Organization Department to the Eighth National Convention", cited above; see also, George Charney, A Long Journey, p. 94.

²⁰"On the Main Immediate Tasks of the C.P.U.S.A.", Resolution adopted by the Central Committee Plenum, January 15-18, 1935, The Communist 15 (February, 1935): p. 124.

²¹Earl Browder, "The Communist Position on the Labor Party Question," in Communism in the United States (New York: International Publishers, 1935), pp. 284, 287, italics added.

²²Daily Worker 4 July, 1935, pp. 1-3.

²³See any Daily Worker, beginning in September, 1936.

²⁴See, "On the Main Immediate Tasks of the C.P.U.S.A.," pp. 120, 125.

²⁵Daily Worker 4 July, 1935, p. 2.

²⁶See Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, edited by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1978), especially "The Modern Prince," pp. 123-205.

²⁷George Dimitroff, The United Front (San Francisco: Proletarian Publishers, 1975), pp. 34, 37.

²⁸Dimitroff, pp. 69-70; See, also, "Extracts from the Resolution of the Seventh Comintern Congress on Fascism, Working-Class Unity, and the Tasks of the Comintern," in Degras, Vol. 3, p. 368.

²⁹Earl Browder, "Democracy or Fascism," Report of the Central Committee to the Ninth National Convention of the Communist Party USA, June 24, 1936, in The People's Front (New York: International Publishers, 1938), p. 25.

³⁰Ibid., p. 30.

³¹Ibid., pp. 30, 32.

³²Ibid., p. 32.

³³Israel Amter, "Organizational Changes in the New York District of the Party," The Communist 16 (May, 1936): p. 467.

³⁴"Results of Organization in the Ninth District," Party Organizer IX (March, 1936): p. 18.

³⁵Alice Udrew, "Work in Parents Association Brings Concrete Results," Party Organizer IX (November, 1936), pp. 21-22.

³⁶Margaret
 ~Margaret Cowl, "Neighborhood Work," Party Organizer IX (April, 1936): p. 29.

³⁷Udrew, p. 22.

³⁸John Williamson, Dangerous Scot (New York: International Publishers, 1969), pp. 115-116.

³⁹John Williamson, "Akron: A New Chapter in American Labor History," The Communist 16 (May, 1936): pp. 415-416; 423.

See also, Bernstein, Turbulent Years, pp. 589-602, for a narrative of the Akron strike.

CHAPTER NINE

THE DERADICALIZED PARTY

The Communists were active participants in the labor and progressive movements of the mid-1930's. As early as 1934, they had begun to abandon their own rival organizing structures, and to seek formal alliances with groups of the non-Communist left. During 1935 and 1936 they had softened the class struggle content of their ideology, pulled back somewhat on their engagement in independent political action, and restrained some of their militants from too openly broadcasting their Communist affiliations. Yet they kept their fractions and caucuses, and continued to articulate an anti-capitalist ideology, which included a call for the revolutionary overthrow of the existing state, and the imposition of socially owned modes of production.

The problem, for the student of the American Communist party, is to find in its practice, anytime after the 1936 Presidential election, further evidence for a consistent, continued, visible, and independent kernel of radical activity. At the risk of oversimplification, one might say that Roosevelt's sweeping victory totally collapsed whatever energies remained within the Party for holding to a sharp, and resistant, ideological course. For, following that event, the Party reduced its sphere of distinct and separate political ac-

tivity to the role of aspiring left-wing mentor to the progressive movement. It began, almost immediately, to mute the organizational identity of its activists, and to strip whatever initiatives it did make in its own name, of all socialist content.

The General Motors sit-down strike, covering the early winter months of 1937, was the first great social conflict to occur after Roosevelt's triumph. It is, in a sense, a testing ground of the impact of the political events of the time on the character of Communist ideology, strategy, and day to day practice. For the sit-down strikes in auto, beginning in Flint, Michigan, at the very end of December, 1936, and lasting for more than six weeks, represent a decisive, empirically verifiable, turning point in the move of the American Communist party towards full abandonment of a distinct organizational politics, and a class-conflict program.

There is no question as to whether individual Communists were active and visible in the General Motors strike. Party members gave leadership on all levels, from within the occupied factories, to the picket lines, to the bargaining table itself. As soon as the sit-down occurred, for example, the strikers held an election, and a Communist, Walter Moore, was elected Mayor of Fisher Body #1, head of a council of ten. That was on the shop level. On another level, the signatures of Wyndham Mortimer, a UAW organizer, and Lee Pressman, counsel for the CIO, men whose Communist affiliations were hardly secret, appeared on the final agreement, along with those of John L. Lewis, and William F. Knudsen, President of General Motors.¹

There is a great deal of contemporary evidence recounting the activism of individual Communists, and their local units, during

the Flint strike. In the Cleveland Fisher Body plant, a nucleus which had only about a dozen members grew, as a result of organization sparked by the strike, to about 50. The nucleus met daily, distributed the Daily Worker, and put out a special edition of its shop paper, The Sparkplug. Inside the plants on strike in Detroit, groups of Communists met daily to discuss problems, and plan strategies. Walter Moore, the Communist mayor of Fisher Body #1, was so involved, that minutes of the strike committee indicate a resolution was passed commanding "that Walt Moore be put to bed."²

Outside the factory, the Communists raised money, manned soup kitchens, organized on picket lines, knocked at doors to marshal support. Party members, William Weinstone wrote, "not only in the areas of the strike but in various parts of the country, gave moral and material aid, helped to collect food and funds, arranged solidarity meetings, helped the union in the distribution of its material, and gave practical assistance in other ways."³ Wherever there was responsibility to be taken, the Communists were available to take it. And the C.I.O., in this awkward beginning stage, was, in the main, quite happy to give it to them. Their experience in militant organization was welcome and needed.

The presence of individual Communists in all aspects of activity relating to the Flint sit-down strike is a matter of record. But the clear and distinct presence of the Party as an organization is something else again. The Party units functioned most actively within the plants. In one plant, according to an organizer, "two nuclei were formed, because when fifteen people meet inside a factory, the stool-pigeons use the occasion to say that cliques are

forming." Since the Communists conceived of their fractions as legitimate political caucuses, it went without saying that, in their minds, anyone who accused them of cliquish and conspiratorial behavior must have been a stool pigeon. The way to get around the charge was to become less visible, and meet in smaller groups. "So the group was divided into two units and a steering committee was established which met with the Section Organizer every day to discuss matters of policy."⁴

That the Communists tried to hold themselves together as organized groups inside the plants during the sit-down strikes did not mean that they functioned in opposition to the union. Their policy, in fact, was precisely the contrary. Indeed, there was so strong an intent to appear as an integral part of the C.I.O., that the sense of an independent political agency, which generates collective action, and maintains its own institutional force, began to disappear.

Roger Keeran, in his study of the Party's behavior during the General Motors strike, concludes that the Communists deliberately played down their political ideas. He cites Carl Haessler, for example, a long-time Socialist and left-wing journalist, who was editor of the UAW newspaper at the time. Haessler, in his oral history at Wisconsin State University, recorded that, while the "people at the center of things were largely Communists," there was very little 'politicizing' (sic) which went on. "No national CP functionaries spoke in Flint or visited the union headquarters," Keeran writes. And William Weinstone, who was state chairman of the Michigan party at the time of the Popular Front, told Keeran, in a 1971 interview,

"I didn't speak at any strike meetings, and wouldn't."

The Communists, as opposed to their strategy at Akron, were especially careful, in the Flint strike, to distinguish between their roles as members of the Communist party, and as members of the United Auto Workers. "When local party members spoke at rallies, they did so as union members and not party members," Keeran points out. An unsigned article in Party Organizer advised Communist activists on union and strike committees to keep the distinction between the Communist and union militant clear. When the Party comrades on such committees make proposals, the article informed its readership, they do not make them "in the name of the Party. They make these proposals as union men."⁵

Keeran, who is unsympathetic to the deradicalization thesis, justifies these tactical directions by arguing that, first, they were an attempt to undercut red-baiting charges, and, secondly they were necessary, given the reformist attitude of both the workers and the C.I.O. "Under these circumstances, raising revolutionary slogans would only have divided the strikers, confused public opinion, and played into the hands of those who were imputing revolutionary objectives to the strikers."⁶ This, I suggest, is a somewhat ingenuous position.

To begin with, the Communists had been red-baited since the year One. The red-baiting at Flint was certainly no more overwhelming than that which had occurred in Akron the year before. And finally, given their welcome into the C.I.O. by John L. Lewis, the Communists were experiencing more legitimacy and support from non-Communist groups

than they had ever known. What must be explained is the shift towards organizational accomodation which took place during the Flint strike without there having been a concomitant increase in external political hostility.

Of greater import is that Keeran's observations miss the nature of the change in the Party's operation. The problem is not that the Communists were now playing down 'revolutionary slogans' in their union work. They had abandoned revolutionary slogans in their union work as far back as 1934, when they'd decided to dismantle the T.U.U.L., and move into the Federation, and into unaffiliated labor groups. The Communists had long ago recognized that they must work for reformist ends if they were to have any ideological impact on American workers.

What is different about the Flint strike is that, for the first time, there is a move towards abandonment of an independent role for the Party, an attempt to play down any strong, visible connection between the individual Communist militant, and the Party organization.

Certainly the politics of democratic coalition demanded that a delicate balance be maintained between the viewpoint of a particular political group, and that of the larger alliance. And certainly the Communists had spent a good deal of their history alienating potential partners by assuming their own particular goals and interpretations were the only valid ones for the labor and progressive movement as a whole. But if the Party was going to maintain at least a vestige of the radical notion of political leadership, some form of clearly articulated identity between Communist affiliation on the

one hand, and union membership, on the other, had to be retained. Some irreducible modicum of organizational visibility, agency, and force is essential to the character of radical practice itself. For without such, there is no collective instrument available to socialist groups by which they can introduce the ideas of a radical paradigm, and attempt to disseminate them throughout popular consciousness.

In the 1937 strike, Communist militants began to suffuse their political identity in the C.I.O. and progressive labor movement generally. A radical Popular Front strategy requires differentiation within alliance. But the Communists, perhaps in eagerness to be accepted now, so they could exercise radical influence in the American labor movement 'later on', began to forget all about the importance of such ideological organizational distinction.

One gets a feel for the way in which this dissolution of independent activism was carried out and transmitted by reading the Party's authoritative analysis of the General Motors strike, written by Weinstone, and published in the March, 1937 issue of the Communist. The Party is described as if it were an appendage to the C.I.O. in the strike, a militant, advanced, and essential appendage, to be sure, but an appendage nevertheless. Weinstone, for example, discusses seven factors which, he feels, were responsible for the strike victory. There was the sit-down tactic, the solidarity of the strikers, the leadership of the C.I.O., support from some unions in the A.F. of L., help from the Auto Workers' International, the use of modern mass tactics, such as "agitation through bulletins and special newspapers...successful use of the sound car...mass singing of labor solidarity songs...labor theatre as a medium of agitation and educa-

tion." And finally, Weinstone writes, "the victory was won because the union did not hesitate to use political as well as economic weapons of struggle." Nowhere is a separate, active role for the Communists cited as one of the reasons the U.A.W. won the strike. This may have been a blow for modesty and accuracy in the Party's political writing. But it was clearly a change. For never, in close to eighteen years of existence, had the American party ever been so circumspect.

It is not until the very last pages of this official evaluation of one of the most important breakthroughs in American labor history that the separate presence of the Communist party is even acknowledged. "There is no doubt about the fact that the Communists were active," Weinstone writes, "particularly at the most decisive points of the struggle, that there the strike was strongest, and this made for the success of the whole battle."⁷

That, of course, sounds more like the old rhetoric. But one looks in vain for specific instances of where and how the Party, as a party, took separate and distinct organizational action.

At Akron, the year before, the Party, without offering revolutionary slogans, had issued its own leaflets, supported its own program, arranged meetings with picket captains, broadcast intra-union political stands on radio. Its demands, at all times, were ideologically limited, and strike related. There was no attempt at any sort of direct political confrontation with the Rubber Workers' leadership. The Communists, it is true, felt this leadership had been too eager to accept Administration proposals that the issues in the strike be submitted to arbitration. But many non-Communist workers felt that way as well.

During the Akron strike, the Communists worked in alliance with the union's immediate goals and reformist ideological perspective, without burying their own visibility as an organization. At Flint, on the other hand, there was the ever-present Daily Worker distribution. There were the discreetly held unit meetings in the occupied factories. There was, at one point, the city-wide distribution of a Communist sponsored shop paper, The Spotlight.⁸ Barring these limited and, in their way, routine practices, however, there is no indication in the historical record that any other independent, separately organized, Communist political activity took place. And if such activities did take place, but are not in the record, then so much the worse.

The evidence of the times points in the opposite direction. The contemporary comments and assessments show an awareness that rank and file Communists were beginning to function as individuals in their various activities, rather than as representatives of an organized radical movement. "The present strike struggles in the auto industry," stated an article in the Party Organizer, "raise sharply before us the work of Party organizations during strikes." The author was not prepared to admit that a serious problem had already materialized among party members in the Flint strike, but a concern was clearly present. When every party member works "merely as an individual," the writer warned,

without the Party organization in the shop or the section working in an organized manner, then the general strike activity does not receive the full benefit of the existence and the role of the Party, and the Party as such does not appear in the picture at all. Even if the Party unit meets and discusses all questions in an organized manner, makes proposals

through the regular democratic organs of the unions and the strike, such things while already a big step...do not by themselves solve the task of bringing forward the policies of the Party in its name, do not acquaint the workers with the role and activity of the Party.

The units and section committees must see to it that the Communists carry on activity in their own name, the article insists, "through leaflets, shop bulletins, the Daily Worker..., through Party mass meetings, through individual contacts. In this way they acquaint the workers with the position of the Party..." If such independent and open activism does not appear, the writer states, then the strikers will have no way of knowing that the Party was a factor.⁹

Other comments and criticisms, appearing after the auto strike, were less discreet and indirect. I have already cited the article by William Weinstone, which consciously downplayed whatever there had been, during the strike, of independent Communist activity. It almost presented the Party's low profile as a virtue. A few months later, however, Weinstone's attitude was less sanguine. There was "no Party building carried on by the Party units or Party members," he ruefully complained in the August, 1937, Party Organizer.¹⁰

An article which appeared in the June issue of this journal for working Communist militants, gave a more detailed picture. The Communists outside the factories tended "to become active around the soup kitchens and the picket lines, and to forget completely the political role that the street units and section committees must play," the author, A. Allen, stressed.

Some of the workers knew that these active people who worked from fourteen to sixteen hours a day, were Communists, but the majority of the workers did not know us. This was obvious, as only in isolated instances was the independent role of the Party brought forward.

...The Party appeared in spots but not as part of the struggle, did not reach all sections with its program and position on the strike.

The political intensity of the times, the excitement of being a full part of the action of the moment, the prestige that went along with knowing one's experience was an important factor in the prevailing atmosphere of struggle and good feeling, combined, it might be said, to seduce the Communists away from their independent work.

The tendency that prevailed during the strike in the lower organizations of the Party was one which showed that individual comrades had become so immersed in the practical tasks of winning the strike that the political tasks of the Party were sorely neglected.¹¹

One fought to win a strike. But one had to do so without losing what, according to Leninist theory, was the defining quality of a radical movement--a distinct and separate vanguard political identity.

The breakdown of Party identification among the front line militants was not limited to the General Motors strike. Jack Johnstone, for example, observed the same phenomenon in the steel industry. When a strike was called, the first tendency "was to liquidate the unit by merging into the union and strike apparatus." The District organizers, however, convinced local membership to keep their Communist units intact. But the formal retention of independent structure did not, of itself, prevent the weakening of Communist identity.

First, our comrades were active in the committees of the union. Together with this came added strike tasks, and consequently most of our comrades were lost in the tasks of the union and the strike, and the unit for a moment collapsed as an independent Party organization.

Again, as in all such cases, our Party is the one selected for neglect. The basic cause of this is the lack of theoretical training; the lack of understanding the role of the Party as a vanguard Party, and not a mere emergency helper in the struggle for immediate demands.

Such problems, says Johnstone, are "not at all easy to solve."¹²

William Z. Foster, surveying the breadth of the Party's actions during the first half of 1937, saw this decay of structural attachment as a difficulty which threatened the entire movement. "... (I)n various united front movements," he wrote, "the Party tended to lose its identity in the general work and consequently failed to develop the definite and visible mass leadership necessary for the most effective Party building." Foster found what he called "evidences of this Right tendency" in all the major organizing campaigns of the day, especially those in steel, auto, and textile. "... the Party must not be simply a helper or auxiliary to the various current mass movements...", Foster warned. "It is not enough that the Party be active; its activities must also take on a leading character."¹³

Foster was speaking in reaction to the general course of events taking place in the Party. For the Communists were not only retreating from a distinct political role in their union activity. On the national level, leadership was being drawn in the same direction. And, of necessity, it was a direction paralleled in the areas of local political strategy and neighborhood action.

In the remainder of this chapter I will document some of the ways in which the Party moved, during 1937 and 1938, to accomodate its ideology and practice to the existing social order. These events, I believe, will help demonstrate how a policy of deradicalization came to define the politics of American Communism.

- 2 -

Despite the drift of individual Communists in the unions towards political identification with the C.I.O., deradicalization might have been avoided had national leadership continued to propagate a class struggle orientation in ideology and program. The Party could have presented a radical frame of reference in its newspapers and journals, its special political events, the activities and agitation of its street units, its cultural programs and affairs.

Without calling for revolution, or breaking with the labor movement, or attacking Roosevelt, the Communists could still have used the educational aspects of practice to sharpen, in myriad public ways, the notion that a fundamental dichotomy existed between working-class interests and socialist values on the one hand, and the capitalist economic structure on the other. But the theoretical and strategic writings which emerged from national headquarters grew ever more expansive and ambiguous.

"We fully and completely reject all ideas which place the working class in opposition to the other class groups, farmers, petty bourgeoisie, moving towards the People's Front," Earl Browder told a Plenary session of the Central Committee in June, 1937, adding the emphasis himself. "Such ideas," he continued, "are the basic stock

in trade of the Trotskyist disrupters and wreckers..."¹⁴ Browder's implication that the interests of the working and middle classes were compatible, as long as the latter accepted the Popular Front, muddled a traditional assumption of Marxist theory. In Marx's view, the professional and merchant classes are caught between labor and capital, and therefore have interests both in common with, and in opposition to, each of them. Browder, by not stating all the terms of the argument, deliberately shaded over major, theoretical incompatibilities between Marxian socialism, and New Deal liberalism. There were interests in common, and interests not in common.

Plainly and simply, the national leadership at this time was attempting to transform the American Communist party into an organizational extension of Roosevelt progressivism. All through the Presidential campaign of 1936, for example, the Communists had worked to build an independent Farmer-Labor party. Roosevelt's victory, however, destroyed their hopes that some sort of Popular Front coalition party, independent and to the left of the Democrats, might emerge after the election.

There was soon a switch of focus. The left wing of the Democratic party itself was conceived as the potential nucleus for the new, independent, anti-fascist movement. A progressive center was taking shape and growing "within the womb of the disintegrating two old parties," Browder informed the June Plenary. It would be born as a national party, he explained, when it came to replace, through the political shifts and realignments of the day, "one of the old traditional parties, contesting and possibly winning control of the federal government from the hour of its birth. What parti-

cular name the caprice of history may baptize it with is immaterial to us."

There is a clear hint, here, that the name of whatever Popular Front party did emerge out of the turbulence of America's class tensions might be akin to 'Democratic party'. Browder obviously foresaw a People's Movement strong enough, if not to take over the Democrats, then to break off so large a chunk as to force a major realignment of the American political system to the left. The Democratic party, Browder argued, was not a 'unity' which could be discussed with any value at all.

In the main this party is moving in a progressive direction, though very unevenly, under the influence of large desertions of its Right-wing leadership and upper class supporters, and its growing support from the oppressed classes--that process which we call a regrouping of classes... there is being formed within the formal limits of the Democratic party a progressive wing...; In a few cases...these democratic progressive forces came close to the People's Front movement. In their majority, they will be allies of the working class in this movement in the near future.¹⁵

To hear Browder tell the story, the Democratic party would soon be facing dissolution, and the Communists, spearhead of its progressive flank, would be there, in the thick of change, to lead and re-organize the newly emerging political structure ever leftward.

Before long the Communists began to support Democratic candidates, endorse politicians attached to urban, Democratic machines, and, for the first time, strongly identify with Roosevelt's administration. In September of 1937, for example, in an address delivered to the Massachusetts Communist party in Symphony Hall, Boston, Browder approvingly quoted from a recent speech by the President. Roosevelt

had expressed the idea that a high and decent standard of living was possible for all people in society, 'if only government is intelligent and energetic in giving the right direction to economic life'. Essentially, Roosevelt was presenting to the public a liberal, Keynesian economic philosophy, seasoned with the social pragmatism of John Dewey.

Browder's support for the President was close to unqualified. "I have no hesitation in declaring for the Communist party and its followers," he said,

that with the central thoughts and the direction of President Roosevelt's speech we are in practical agreement, and that on such questions with which we disagree, these are not questions for immediate practical solution.¹⁶

The nature of the disagreements is nowhere discussed; the problem is pushed off into the future somewhere. The attitude taken by Browder but a year before, that the Communists could not support Roosevelt because 'he at most tries to smooth out some of the worst abuses of capitalism', has been completely reversed. But it was not Roosevelt who changed. The Communists have dropped any sort of ideological sharpness and socialist content from their public discourse.

Browder's support for Roosevelt's progressive sentiments did not stop with kind words for Keynesian economics and pragmatist social philosophy. The theory of the capitalist system as one controlled and manipulated by a ruling class, that is, the theory of class struggle itself was cast aside. It was replaced with the populist notion, familiar in American politics, that, in times of economic dislocation, political power has come to rest in the hands of

plutocracy, a conspirational group of economic royalists.

This point of view does not perceive capitalism to be inherently exploitative and repressive of the working class; rather, it maintains that, if the system is not working properly, the fault lies with the greed of a few at the top. Roosevelt was comfortable with this theoretical frame. "We have those who really fear the majority rule of democracy," the President had said, those

who want the old forms of economic and social control to remain in a few hands. They say in their hearts: 'If constitutional democracy continues to threaten our control, why should we be against the plutocratic dictatorship which would perpetuate our control'?17

Browder, who cited these words verbatim, could have offered a friendly challenge to this formulation, but in such a way as to keep the Communists within the context of a program of immediate political support for Roosevelt. Instead, he fully embraced Roosevelt's language and concepts, and, by implication, the liberal-progressive world view in which they were intellectually rooted.

"We Communists declare our full agreement with this identification of the main enemy and the form of its threat against the people," Browder said.

...This is a terrific threat, for these economic royalists control the economy of the country, control a large part of the President's own party in Congress, control numerous local and state governments, and are building up private armies, vigilante movements, and arsenals.18

Here, Browder grants validity to a theory of political domination which is incompatible with Marxist ideas. In Marxian theory, economic royalists are not the source of political and economic oppression; it is the class system itself that is responsible for

limiting the freedom of workers, and it is the never ending search for private profit which is responsible for recurring cycles of depression.

Browder buries all of these distinctions, essential to any program of radical education and propaganda, beneath his own brand of liberal-progressive rhetoric. He even goes so far as to state that, should Roosevelt's program succeed, there will be no need for proletarian dictatorship in America.

Proletarian dictatorship can become a practical order of the day in America only if President Roosevelt's promise of a higher standard of living under the present system is defeated or betrayed. We of the Communist Party are prepared to co-operate with everybody who will help to win that higher standard of living for the masses.

The Communist Party repudiates now, as in the past, all theories or proposals looking toward a forcible imposition of Socialism or any utopia upon the majority of the people...19

One might point out that Browder does not, here, rule out the forcible imposition of Socialism upon a minority of the people--referring, I suppose, to the owning classes and those whom the Communists identified as the agents of capital in the maintenance and administration of state power. But that is a fine point, given the larger thrust of Browder's ideas. For he implies that the success of the New Deal reforms would be adequate to satisfy the needs, and meet the interests, of the American working class. Once this proposition had been offered, not a shred of radical ideology remained in the Party's educational program, political campaigns, and day to day organizing efforts.

I have now cited, in this and the previous section, two major shifts in the area of the Party's program and direct practice

which, in the first part of 1937, accompanied each other, and led the Communists towards a politically deradicalized frame of action. On the level of day to day organization, the militants, though ever committed and hard-working, began to function more as individual actors in the Popular Front coalitions, and less as Communists who had a clear and strong identification with Party policies. On the level of national program and ideological development, the Marxist paradigm became muted. There was explicit retreat from agitation that presented, as an essential part of theoretical content, ideas associated with the concepts of historical materialism and class struggle.

Along with these two trends there appeared a third. Activists not only began to become absorbed politically into the coalitions which defined the Popular Front. They began to seek comfort and acceptance from within the society at large, to assimilate themselves into the values and life-style of a society whose legitimacy they wished, allegedly, to confront and challenge.

As early as June, 1936, John Williamson was warning the Ninth Party Convention against a growing complacency in the membership, which had begun to appear with the recent upturn in employment. "As a result of being more economically independent, there is developing a different atmosphere among Party members," Williamson stated.

There is a feeling of more family life, of the need for more time at home, for increased pleasure. While in the past their Party spirit, fervor, and attachment were kept up primarily through the demonstrations and similar type of activities in the struggle for existence, today this is no longer so.

It is not that Williamson was against family life or time at home

or, it is only fair to say, even pleasure. He was worried, rather, that these individual pursuits were taking precedence in people's lives over their commitment to the demands of social struggle. The Party had neglected adequate political training in the past, Williamson argued, and, consequently, "we now face a critical question of substituting revolutionary consciousness, on the basis of Marxist-Leninist understanding, for the purely spontaneous and elemental class feeling and spirit." A new laxity was slipping into Party life, undermining revolutionary discipline, and turning members away from a conscious readiness to respond to whatever the organization required.²⁰

Despite Williamson's misgivings, this shift in attitude began to receive programmatic recognition all through 1937 and 1938. It was expressed, I suggest, through the Party's proud attempts, in these years, to present itself as a fully Americanized institution, although many of its efforts in this direction were so obviously forced, as to be more ludicrous than telling. Examples of this orientation will appear towards the end of the chapter, but for now, I want to cite one particular instance of the way in which the Party fought to project itself as an inherent part of the American ethos.

In the Spring of 1937 an article was published in Party Organizer which described the new headquarters of Section 24. Section 24 covered lower midtown, and its headquarters sat on East 29th Street. The article was entitled, "A New Neighborhood Institution," and to read it, one would think that the Communist Party neighborhood center was only a slightly politicized version of the local

YMCA. No paraphrase can convey the flavor and atmosphere of the Party's new direction as well as can the actual words written in their midst. "Walking east on 29th Street between Lexington and 3rd Avenues," the article begins, "you pass first the Andreath Talmud Torah, a Jewish religious institution.

A little further down is a dark, subdued, solemn looking church. Customary institutions of a neighborhood in the mixed East Side. Across from the church in bright contrast is a building ablaze with lights. It might be a private evening school, or the offices of a nice neighborhood club. It is a respectable, modest, four-story building of quiet fire-brick with long dignified French type windows. It is the new headquarters of Section 24 of the Communist Party...

Note the use of such key adjectives as 'respectable', 'modest', 'dignified'. While these Party headquarters are much more alive and bright than the customary religious institutions on the block, they fit in with things otherwise, and could be an evening school or a 'nice' neighborhood club. The implication is practically unavoidable: there is nothing to fear from Communists, for they are just like everyone else.

The writer enters "the large, clean lobby," and becomes "immediately aware of a busy, smooth-running institution."

Bonnie Clark, a pretty smiling girl in Room
4--information--asks cheerily: "Yes, Comrade?"

"I have an appointment with Comrade Brown."

"Just a moment please..."

How 'cute' this Bonnie Clark, with her typically American name, is made to seem from the description. One wonders if, in keeping with the times, she had bobbed hair. Or if any of the women in the Party bridled at the chauvinist overtones in this portrayal of the 'pretty, smiling, cheery girl' who worked as receptionist in a Communist

headquarters.

From behind his "large, orderly desk," Comrade Brown, the section organizer, greeted the interviewer.

Hanging on the wall beside him is the large Sunday Worker map of Spain, testimony that the work for Spain is constantly before Section 24. Close to the map is a large portrait of Lenin.

Brown speaks quietly, patiently. He is unassuming...

"We wanted a place that would establish the Party as an acceptable, normal organization of the neighborhood. Too often people in the neighborhood have been justified, because of the appearance of our Party headquarters, in what they think of the Party.

"We wanted a place to which we can proudly bring people outside the Party."

Section 24 can certainly do that now. Brown cited an instance. There is an East Side Tenant's Association in the section territory, a broad united front association. A woman, a member of the Democratic Party who is a member of the association, came up to the Party headquarters one day for a conference. She was greatly impressed and said so. This helped establish better relations between her and the Party.²¹

Appearances and impressions. Appearances would help legitimize and establish the Party in the progressive movement. Impressions would create better relations between the Communists, and liberal reformers in the Democratic party. Ideas and ideological conflict have nothing to do with the case.

Ideologists, no doubt, have messy and sloppy headquarters. They probably have plain looking secretaries and typists, when they have secretaries and typists at all. They are always raising their voices and yelling. They upset and drive away potential allies, because they continually try to inject conflict and opposing points of

view into discussion. Appearances, on the other hand, help to win friends and influence people.

There are certain theoretical difficulties with Brown's approach. It remains unclear, for example, how appearances expose people to the demanding nature of collective action, or to the sharp ways in which socialist values collide with a cultural system based on the pre-eminent concern with self and one's own. It remains unclear how appearances can bring to fruition a political awareness and understanding which, for its emergence, depends upon the uprooting of deep-set ideological belief.

Comrade Brown provides no answers to such questions. Perhaps he truly thought that making the revolution meant pictures of Lenin, and maps of Spain, on the wall, dark business suits, and speaking quietly to women activists from the Democratic party.

- 3 -

Eventually, the Communists went all the way. They made the decision to dismantle the structural base itself of local, independent radical political action. The Party fraction and caucus, which bound the militants in unions and mass organizations together in groups of their own, were dissolved. Not only were factory cells, plant newspapers, and trade-union units, eliminated, but so were, in the words of Howe and Coser, "all distinctive modes of public organization..."²²

The decision was formally announced in February, 1939, by Jack Stachel, at a combined plenary session of the Central Committee and a Party Builder's Congress. "We are already on the way to abolishing the Party general fractions," Stachel told the assembled vanguard.

When our Party was young, when our ideology was not spread among the masses, when we were still hammering out our basic position, when we had three or four comrades in an organization, the fractions were necessary. But we have developed now, we have a united Party, our influence is felt, the masses are moving to the Left, now, and...conditions today are such that we must lead, not through organized fraction work, but through Communist understanding...and Communist responsibility.

Struggle by osmosis, one might call it, since there would no longer be any material, organizational structures through which to develop and implement Party programs in the Popular Front coalition groups.

The Party still expected "every Communist to act like a Communist," Stachel said. With no caucus meetings to worry about, there would be more time "for every Communist to attend his unit meetings, take up educational work, and give the masses not merely organizational direction, but political guidance..."²³ Introducing Party program into mass work would now be up to individuals, acting, in some mysterious and unexplained way, for the organization as a whole. For, what did it mean to give Communist leadership as an individual? What did one do, and how did one go about doing it?

In the Communist theory of political action, individuals who had no formally structured organizational tie could act only for themselves. Being a member of the Communist Party, U.S.A., did not mean that one acted for the Party in one's union, unless there were some sort of official caucus or labor-related unit to which one was attached. One might be known as a Communist, and therefore, one's behavior had always to be exemplary. But being Communist identified, and acting to further specific programs and particular tactical goals of the Communist party, were two separate existential and activist spheres.

A caucus could put out a newspaper dealing with shop issues. It could print leaflets and express its own point of view in regard to intra-organization controversy. It could sponsor debates on questions which concerned the progressive movement generally. It could hold meetings and conferences, and invite left-wing speakers. It could do all of those things in the name of the Communist party. Individuals, who also happened to be Communists, could, organizationally, do nothing at all. Without the caucuses, there was no way for the Party to present itself as an independent and directing institutional force.

Removal of the caucuses not only left individual Communist militants with no way of politically distinguishing between themselves, and the liberal directions and values of the traditional CIO leadership. It meant they could no longer hold their own Communist union officials accountable. The caucuses were the only mechanisms through which rank and file Communist union members could exercise any control whatsoever over those of their leaders who were moving upwards into the union bureaucracy. "Until the caucuses were abolished," explains Joseph Starobin, "all Communists in any given group or in any campaign would map out strategy and tactics together, and a common discipline would be binding on everyone, no matter what their echelon or particular task." The dissolution of the factions divorced the influentials from the discipline of the rank and file; it relieved them of the obligation to 'build the Party' in their union organization.²⁴ With no caucus, or organized rank and file group, to which he had to account, the Communist trade-union leader more and more began to think and act in the terms of an accomodationist

framework of labor organization. Like other union officials, Bert Cochran writes, he tended to become a bureaucrat, "who must set himself up as a power broker mediating between his constituents, and powers representing employers, public spokesmen, government..."²⁵

The fraction was an essential expression of democracy, as far as the Communists were concerned, for it was based on the direct participation of people in daily and immediate effort to reorder and control the conditions which affected and structured their lives. It was a mode through which people could be involved with each other, and seek to hold each other accountable to the values of the movement. One did not challenge the basic policies which came from the center, but, in most cases, the active Communist was prepared to accept these as democratically derived, and correct. Around the limitless number of tasks necessary for putting into practice a direction which, one felt, would bring the revolution closer, there was the freedom to initiate, to air differences, to argue, to act.

By ending fractions, the Party knocked out from under its rank and file the only structures remaining, in the later Popular Front, through which they could have acted creatively and forcefully as left-wing trade unionists. A decade later, while John Williamson, now national organization secretary, watched the CIO leadership, at the 1948 convention, introduce proposals and platforms designed to isolate and smash the Communists, he mused over what, possibly had gone wrong.

What mistakes had been made? My principal conclusion was that we had not devoted sufficient time to building party strength and organization in the factories and among the rank and file, and had not done enough to develop class understanding and socialist consciousness.²⁶

This puts the case mildly. There had been a conscious decision made to play down an independent organizing role for the Party in the newly emerging unions of the C.I.O.

Grant, first, that the Cold War outcome might not have been any different no matter what alternatives the Communists had followed. The fact remains that whatever potential impact might have pressed on the consciousness and political direction of non-Communist workers, had been, by the Party's own hand, diffused and cancelled. The shop level Communists permitted themselves, literally, to be deradicalized from above. Those who fundamentally disagreed with the decision, but who were not prepared to force a break over the issue, could either just chafe under its workings, or remind themselves, perhaps with irony, that 'the Party must know what it is doing.'²⁷

The only national leader who, at the time, seems to have objected openly to the reformist drift of the Party, and to have re-affirmed Leninist notions of radical organization, was William Z. Foster. "In connection with the general question of advocating advanced slogans and educating the masses," Foster wrote in 1937, "the Party must...lay stress upon the mass propogation of its revolutionary objectives. Recently, there has been considerable slackness in this respect." Foster was not attacking the principle of the Popular Front; he was advocating that the Party not bury itself within it. He compared practice in the American party, with that in

Spain and France.

...the work of the Party must be carried on so openly that the masses can clearly see what the Party is actually doing. The French and Spanish Parties---work in such a way that the masses can plainly recognize their activity. But with us, hiding the face of the Party is one of our greatest present-day weaknesses... It also seriously exposes the Party to demagogic attack.

The Party's line was blunted, Foster complained, and its program, indistinct "in relation to those of the various mass movements that we are supporting."

Foster presented a clear, theoretical notion of what he believed a radical practice had to encompass in the context of a Popular Front strategy. "... (I)t is not enough that the Party support activities conducted solely under the banner of the United Front," he wrote.

It must also develop its own activities as a Party, both in support of the united front line, and also of its own more advanced Communist Party program... In all situations the Communist Party must come forward with its own proposals, press, literature, meetings, etc., and thus show its face clearly to the masses...

But we neglect all this grievously in the practice...²⁸

Foster was in substantive ideological and strategic disagreement with the empirical political behavior of the Party, and was registering his concern. To Foster, who consistently stood on the left in all the political disputes in which he became involved, the notions of appearing reformist and moderate, no matter how noble one's intentions within, and of holding back on independent action, so as not to upset one's partners in coalition, reflected a Communist party sliding towards the morass of deradicalization.

There was, however, one other important political characteristic about William Z. Foster besides his consistent leftism. If, having said his piece, his criticisms received no support from higher reaches in the Party hierarchy, that is, from the Comintern, one could always count on him to keep quiet from that point on. In a movement both defined and trapped by its concept of organizational discipline and loyalty, one would be hard put to find a more disciplined militant, or greater loyalist.

Foster's warnings about the incipient reformism in the American Popular Front were not picked up anywhere in the international movement, and went unheeded at home. The Party in the United States went on to undo itself, and disband the only structures through which it was able to maintain independent voice in the unions and mass organizations. Foster said nothing. Indeed, in his later years, in his official history of the American party, he referred to the liquidation of the factions as "an example of the Party's co-operative spirit."²⁹

As the Popular Front moved on into the late 1930's, the symbols, ideas, and structures of a radical politics disappeared. The Communists portrayed their political beliefs and concepts as being the same as those held, in general, by all good American progressives. "May we remind you that this is Americanism week," a circular of the Party's Louisiana section pointed out.

The Communist Party of Louisiana declares its steadfast loyalty to our nation's democratic institutions, pledging ourselves in word and deed to fight any 'ism' of any clique, group or minority from within our country or from abroad that would destroy or undermine our democratic institutions...

The Wisconsin Young Communist League did grant that there was one small difference between their way of thinking, and that of most other students at the University of Wisconsin. But this did not prevent them from being just plain folks.

Some people have the idea that a YCLer is politically minded, that nothing outside of politics means anything. Gosh no. They have a few simple problems. There is the problem of getting good men on the baseball team this Spring, of opposition from ping-pong teams, of dating girls, etc. We go to shows, parties, dances, and all that. In short, the YCL and its members are no different from other people except that we believe in dialectical materialism as a solution to all problems.³⁰

Obviously, belief in 'dialectical materialism as a solution to all problems' blocked off perception of some of the simpler realities of the American political universe, such as, for example, the kinds of language and concerns that made ordinary, common sense to 'other people'. It is difficult, perhaps to take this material seriously, but let me suggest that many of the young Communists themselves, did.

The above examples may exaggerate the kind of efforts the Communists made to become identified with American values, customs, and politics. But the thrust of the Party's practice was all in this direction, and consistently attempted to wash out any suspected differences between Marxism, and traditional American liberalism. As a 1938 Wisconsin election circular read, "Elect Genuine New Dealers and Liberals... Vote for Fred Bassett Blair, Communist Candidate for U.S. Senator."³¹

By the time of the national elections of 1938, the attempt at an ideological merger between American Communism and American

liberalism had become much more real for the former movement than for the latter. Many Communists, at this point, began to have authentic difficulty in distinguishing themselves from the Democratic party. Al Richmond, who edited the West Coast Daily People's World in these years, tells a story illustrative of the point.

As an example of the ways in which too close an identity with liberal groups could sap the energies of the Communist movement, Richmond relates an incident which occurred during the 1938 California gubernatorial election. On election night he was at a social gathering with comrades, listening to the results come in over the radio.

...when it finally became certain that Olson, the Democrat we had supported, was the winner..., a young woman came dashing over to where I was standing with William Schneiderman, the state Communist leader. "We won!" she gushed. "We won!" Ordinarily courteous, Schneiderman replied with cutting formality: "We did not win, comrade. The Democratic party won."

That he was so taken with this chance remark, that he remembered it for over three decades, Richmond comments,

...suggests that, at the moment, I was swept up by the same exuberance as the young woman, and was jolted, therefore, by the sudden confrontation with what I knew, of course, was the reality...

This distinction, of which Schneiderman was so sharply conscious, was, on the Daily People's World, Richmond emphasizes, a necessity.

"There was a duality in representing a united front platform and simultaneously articulating the distinct Communist viewpoint within the wider political configuration."³² Yet, caught up in the flush of the elections, the alliance with the Democratic party, and the excitement of winning, Richmond, editor of one of the Party's major

publications, forgot all about that crucial sense of 'duality'.

The program of fraternalism with 'progressive elements' in the Democratic party was used to justify bizarre local Communist actions, like the endorsement of key members of the Kelly-Nash slate in the Chicago primaries. The Kelly-Nash machine had been directly responsible for the 1937 Memorial Day massacre against striking Republic steel workers and their families. It had ordered the Chicago police to break up a peaceful, picnic rally. The police fired point-blank into an unarmed crowd. Ten workers were killed, and thirty others beaten so badly, they were hospitalized.

The machine's candidate for Illinois Senator was named Igoe. "Yes," Morris Childs, State Secretary of the Illinois Communists told the Tenth National Convention, "there were some who felt it was sullyng revolutionary purity to support Igoe, candidate for U.S. Senate; slanders were spread by the Trotskyite-fascist crew that we were in a deal with the Kelly-Nash machine." Clear-headed Communists, however, knew how to distinguish between what was crucial, and what secondary, in the establishment of a progressive alliance. "...the Party and the progressives of Illinois understood that the outstanding need was the building of unity behind those candidates who expressed best the program of the democratic front..."

Other problems, as well, arose for some Communists in this strategy of supporting progressive Democrats, corrupt backing or no. Some comrades, Childs admitted, "were troubled by the fact that if they voted in the primaries they would be registered as Democratic voters, and...would not be able for a period of two years to sign petitions to place on the ballot Communists or independents." But

when Communists did things, they really did them.

It had to be made clear to the Party membership that we were not embarking on this policy in a half-hearted way;...if certain sacrifices had to be made to unify the people, we would make them.

The Communists, in these primary election strategies, were literally directed to identify with, and give material support to, Democratic candidates. No doubt in their hearts they remained revolutionaries; but in their ability to mount independent political action, they were registered members of the Party of the Democracy. In New Jersey, they backed office-seekers who were supported by the viciously anti-union regime of Boss Frank Hague.³³

The Communists allied themselves with corrupt and particularistic urban machines, I suggest, because they were trying to think of themselves, and wanted to be thought of, as integral, though left-wing, elements of a progressive Democratic coalition. It was party loyalty that tied them to the bosses--Democratic party loyalty.

From 1937 to 1945, the one programmatic and ideological element which distinguished Communists from, at times even the most moderate progressivism, had to do with their unwavering support of Soviet foreign policy. This would get the Party into a great deal of difficulty with some of its liberal partners in 1939, but, whatever else, the Hitler-Stalin pact cannot be seen as a return to radicalism. It meant, rather, a new orientation and new slogans for a Popular Front strategy that, in its essentials, remained unchanged.

The new Popular Front, which lasted until June, 1941, when German armies marched across the borders of their treaty partner, was anti-war instead of anti-fascist. It witnessed neither the re-

emergence of a class-conflict philosophy, or the re-establishment of independent and local bases of Communist activity and organization. A detailed history of these years, however, extends beyond the scope of the present study.

Radical politics might have failed to take root in the American working class no matter what the Communists had done, for reasons of history and tradition over which they had no control. The issues here are not ones of 'correct' as opposed to 'incorrect' policies; the question is the kind of ideological and structural background essential to a radical politics, no matter what sorts of immediate strategies and directions are taken. There is no reason why two movements, with differing interpretations as to the meaning of current history, but sharing an open commitment to the theory of class struggle, and maintaining distinct organizational profiles, cannot both be considered radical.

The Communists abandoned both of these requisites. They buried the notion of class conflict beneath a populist rhetoric and denuded themselves of any localized political bases from which they could have operated as an outpost of action and influence. "(O)ther Communists parties had retained their organizational base and strengthened themselves through the popular front tactic," Norman Markowitz writes, but,

American Communists had built their mass organizations through identification with the New Deal. Working with and in a sense for Roosevelt, they substituted a loose kind of populist nationalism for a socialist analysis and strategy in America.³⁴

With a program devoid of radical ideological content, and a rank

and file stripped of the ability to function in coherent and concrete political units, there was no way for the American Communist party to infuse Marxist notions of conflict and collective purpose into the progressive social consensus of the time.

The Party had become deradicalized.

- 4 -

I have attempted, so far in this chapter, to document the ways in which the American Communist party dropped the notions of class struggle, and opposition to capitalism, from its ideological vocabulary in the late 1930's. I have explored, as well, the manner in which the Party dissolved its political units within existing progressive and labor organizations, thus leaving itself with no means to exercise what its own theory defined as essential to radical practice: the direct organization of people on immediate and local levels. But the Party went further, even, than this. It let go, finally, of the basic political implication of the doctrine of historical materialism.

According to this most important concept of Marxist thought, mass organization, structured as an independent and material social force, must continually operate as a necessary precondition of radical change. But with the introduction of the democratic front, a kind of organizationally diluted Popular Front, the Party began to reject such an over-all independent political stance.

This dissolution of itself as an independent base of political force and organization did not occur as a vague and subtle erosion of practice over time, but as a direct and specific transformation of

the Party's strategic concept of its role on the Left. The Party dropped the Popular Front, and replaced it with the democratic front, just before the election campaign of 1938. It consciously turned itself into a lobbying and educational pressure group on the left-wing of the progressive movement. A democratic front differs from a People's front, Clarence Hathaway wrote in the Communist, in that the former recognizes that conditions do not always make it possible to unite a broad based mass movement, either "through a formal set of political alliances between the different political groupings, or on a commonly worked out political platform". This new strategic approach was conceived to be a much more informal political set-up than its predecessor. "The democratic front presupposes a more loosely knit coalition of what are in the main, progressive forces, with a program generally progressive, but less clearly defined." Indeed, the democratic front was so informal, that there was no visible political structure to it at all, other, perhaps, than what the Communists may have seen in their imagination.

What is most remarkable about this strategic off-shoot of the Popular Front, and why I cite it as a repudiation of historical materialism, is that, from within its framework, the Party no longer defined its role as that of fighting directly and independently for its own program among the working and liberal middle classes. Rather, the Party restructured itself to work primarily to influence other left-wing organizations, and to convince them to accept the validity of a broad, reformist, anti-fascist program. "We have to be the unifying force and the cement that holds the democratic front together. We must make it a conscious, progressive, anti-fascist force

able to rise above petty bickerings and self-seeking influences."³⁵

In order to demonstrate what they were talking about, the Communists put forth in the 1938 elections what they considered the optimum progressive political platform for the times--"Put America Back to Work! Speed Recovery!" "Guarantee Social Security for All! Guarantee the Health, Education, and Culture of the People!" "Save the Young Generation. Full Rights for the Negro People." "Curb the Power of the Monopolies! Make the Rich Pay the Costs of the Crisis!"³⁶ The Communists did not campaign independently for this program, however, since many of their adherents were now registered Democrats, or, where they could be, members of left-wing, non-Communist progressive parties, such as the American Labor party in New York, or the Farmer-Labor party in Minnesota. What the Communists did, instead, was to assign to themselves the responsibility of acting as general political adviser to the Left as a whole.

Party analysts first divided the "various political forces" of the 1938 election campaign into two categories--"those on the side of progress and those on the side of reaction." Then, the parties within the progressive category were assessed in terms of the extent to which their platforms accorded with the platform of the Communist party--understood, of course, to be the benchmark of the most fully developed progressive politics possible under existing conditions. The Communists, in other words, tried to serve as both mediator and leader "on the side of progress." Their position was that a vote for any of the left or liberal groupings was acceptable, as long as it did not split a progressive vote in such a manner that a force "on the side of reaction" would win office.³⁷ "Defeating reaction" was, in

essence, the only issue the Communists cared about. They studiously ignored an uncomfortable question which Norman Thomas had posed to Earl Browder at a friendly debate the two of them had held at Madison Square Garden in the early days of the Popular Front, in December, 1935. "Yes, it's good to have a People's Front," Thomas had agreed. "But at what price? Can we afford to encourage the illusion that if you only go out and fight against something a miscellaneous crowd dislikes, you win something?..."³⁸

The Communists offered no independent political action of their own in the elections of 1938; their members were too busy out campaigning for Democrats, and other candidates generally recognized as progressive. What they did offer was a mild and reformist political platform which was backed by no organizational pressures, other than those of lobbying and propaganda.

The specific political platforms developed and supported by the Communists in the late 1930's, reformist as they were, do not mark the Party as deradicalized. What does win them the designation is the fact that, outside of their loose, unstructured alliances, they projected neither a Marxist ideology, as I have defined this concept in the paradigm of the first chapter, nor worked to maintain a strong and independent mass political base. In the areas of open, publicly accessible political struggle--the only areas where changes in policy, in the general social experience of working people, and in the content of consciousness itself can occur--the Party merged with what it conceived as an oceanic progressive movement. The notion of the fundamental opposition of capital and labor, to hear the Com-

munists tell it, could be overcome by support for Roosevelt liberalism. The legitimacy of force and violence was an irrelevant, if not embarrassing concept. It was simply not mentioned. While the Communists did continue to hold onto internationalism as an important ideological principle, it was a broadly humanist and cultural internationalism, with its focus on the dignity of all peoples, rather than on a specific and pointed notion of proletarian solidarity. As I reported above, the Party even ceased to refer to itself, in the masthead of the Worker, as a section of the Communist International. In the main, it played down its international political associations, and portrayed itself as the heir of American revolutionary traditions. As for ideological struggle, there were no radical ideas left for which to battle. And with the abandonment of fractions, that is, the total dissolution of Communist militancy into organizational action and push for the immediate ends of the labor and progressive movements, neither were there the vanguard structures through which such independent struggle could be carried on.

It may be true, as many of their critics charge, that all Communist parties, whatever their line of the moment, harbor within themselves a hard, strategic, revolutionary face, ever waiting for the right historical conditions in which to show itself. But even if this is an accurate depiction of the inner dynamics of a Communist movement, it has no relation to the question of whether a given Party is radical or not. For, if reformist strategies are not backed up with open propagation of the basic concepts and assumptions that define class struggle, then inner, 'hidden' militancy (a contradiction

in terms, really) must remain without effect. To turn the 'radical' face suddenly outward, simply exposes an oppositionist party as manipulative, leads to no increase in socialist understanding among the working classes, and undermines the movement's ability to generate trust in its leadership, and in its ideas.

One cannot simply turn a publicly advanced radical perspective on and off, like a light switch. Politically alert workers know that. The recent literature of Communist reminiscence indicates that many of those who finally found themselves forced to break with the Party came to recognize that. Only old-line Stalinists, on the one hand, and certain anti-Communist academics and politicians, on the other, groups whose ideas are usually incompatible, except for the implication that industrial workers do not have the intellect to see through bald political manipulation, seem unaware of it.

Parties are deradicalized if there is an absence of ideological struggle. There must be present to educational and theoretical practice a public, clearly articulated model which asserts that the class interests of owner and manual worker, whether the latter produces goods or services, are ultimately and unalterably opposed. The open lack of such ideological content is a necessary and sufficient condition for affirming that a given oppositionist movement is no longer radical.

This was precisely the situation presented in the political practice of the American Communist party in the later years of the 1930's. Its reformism begins shortly after the re-election of Roosevelt in 1936, is not changed fundamentally by the sudden need, in 1939, to take an anti-war stance in regard to Germany, becomes positively

collaborationist after Germany invades Russia, and lasts until 1945, when Soviet foreign policy interests again require Communist parties to take a militant stance against American capitalism.

In the United States, this meant the purge of Earl Browder. But it did not mean the return to a consistent politics of radical struggle. For the Communists were too busy defending themselves against political attack to develop a coherent policy and program of any sort. Cold war anti-communism, the finally unfettered wrath of many liberals and social-democrats in leadership in the C.I.O., the promulgation of the blacklist, the Smith Act trials, and the rise of McCarthyism made it impossible for the Communists to pull together and redirect themselves. The most they seemed able to accomplish was to play a key role in the campaign of Henry Wallace for President. Wallace was seeking what would now be called a policy of detente with the Soviet Union. His bid for election was an unmitigated disaster.

In these post-war years, the Communist party was eliminated as a significant voice on the American left.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER NINE

¹See Wyndham Mortimer, Organize! (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), pp. 123-141.

²John Williamson, "A General Motors Shop Branch: Before and After the Strike" Party Organizer X (June, 1937): pp. 15-16; A. Allen, "Party Building in Auto, Ibid., p. 11; See, also, Roger Keeran, The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Union (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 161.

³William Weinstone, "The Great Auto Strike," The Communist 17 (March, 1937): p. 225.

⁴Allen, "Party Building...", p. 11.

⁵Keeran, p. 162; "The Work of the Party During Strikes," Party Organizer X (February, 1937): 2.

⁶Keeran, Ibid.

⁷Weinstone, "The Great Auto Strike," pp. 210-228.

⁸Allen, "Party Building..." p. 13.

⁹"Work of Party During Strikes," p. 2.

¹⁰Cited in Keeran, p. 164.

¹¹Allen, "Party Building...", pp. 12-13.

¹²Jack Johnstone, "How a Steel Unit Functions," Party Organizer X (August, 1937): 36.

¹³William Z. Foster, "Political Leadership and Party Building," The Communist 17 (July, 1937): 135.

¹⁴Earl Browder, "The Communists in the People's Front," in The People's Front (New York: International Publishers, 1938), p. 172.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 165, italics added.

¹⁶Browder, "Democracy and the Constitution," in Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁷Cited by Browder in Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 239.

²⁰John Williamson, "Strengthening the Trade Union Backbone of the Farmer-Labor Party Movement in Ohio" The Communist 16 (August, 1936): 792.

²¹Sam Roberts, "A New Neighborhood Institution," Party Organizer X (March-April, 1937): 35-38.

²²See Cochran, Labor and Communism, pp. 136-137, Howe and Coser, The American Communist Party, pp. 335-336; Joseph R. Starobin, American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 39-41; Mike Davis, "The Barren Marriage of American Labor and the Democratic Party," New Left Review No. 124 (November-December, 1980): 60.

²³Jack Stachel, "Build the Party for Peace, Democracy, and Socialism," Report delivered at the Plenary Session of the Central Committee, C.P.U.S.A., and National Party Builders Congress, New York, February 18-21, 1938, The Communist 18 (March, 1938): 234.

²⁴Starobin, pp. 37-40.

²⁵Cochran, p. 130.

²⁶John Williamson, Dangerous Scot, p. 156.

²⁷I am indebted to a series of discussions with Morris L. Eisenstein for the general line of argument developed in this section.

²⁸William Z. Foster, "Political Leadership...", pp. 641, 642, 644.

²⁹William Z. Foster, "Breakthrough in Industrial Organization," p. 73.

³⁰Cited in Howe and Coser, pp. 340, 338.

³¹Cited in Norman Markowitz, "From the Popular Front to Cold War Liberalism," in The Specter, Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism, edited by Robert Griffith and Athan Theoharis (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), p. 98.

³²Al Richmond, A Long View from the Left (New York: Delta Books, 1972), pp. 273-274.

³³Morris Childs, "Building the Democratic Front in Illinois," Speech to the Tenth National Convention of C.P.U.S.A., New York, May 29, 1938, The Communist 18 (September, 1938): p. 812; Mike Davis, "Barren Marriage of American Labor and Democratic Party," p. 61.

³⁴Markowitz, "From the Popular Front to...", p. 98.

³⁵Hathaway, Clarence, "Building the Democratic Front," The Communist 17 (May, 1938): 404, 407.

³⁶See "Political Forces and Issues," Prepared by Educational Department of National Committee, C.P.U.S.A. The Communist 17 (October, 1938): 891-905.

³⁷Ibid., p. 891.

³⁸"Which Road For American Workers--Socialist or Communist?" Debate between Norman Thomas and Earl Browder, Madison Square Garden, New York City, November 27, 1935. Reprinted in Daily Worker 14 December, 1935. See p. 11 for Thomas quote.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCEPTS TOWARDS A THEORY OF RADICAL PRACTICE

I have tried, in this dissertation, to develop as systematic and rigorous a method as possible for determining the extent to which the American Communist party, during the years of the Popular Front and later New Deal, succumbed to a politics of deradicalization.

The methodology has been two-fold. First, relying mainly upon the writings of Lenin and Luxemburg, I attempted to present a general and controlling paradigm that delineated, in rough outline, the kind of theoretical propositions to which a twentieth-century radical movement would, by definition, adhere. In the first chapter I detailed a set of propositions which, I believe, reflects the ideas most closely associated with modern, Marxian radicalism. The theoretical principles I listed were: historical materialism; fundamental opposition of capital and labor; legitimacy of force and violence in the overthrow of capitalism; the working class conceived as an international political entity, with objectively shared interests that over-ride nationality; and the necessity of ideological struggle, carried out through a politically organized vanguard leadership, if there is to be an eventual acceptance and internalization of socialist ideas and values.

The paradigm was proposed as a working model. Other analysts

might choose to emphasize other aspects of radical thought, such as its notion that the state is the organized representative of the ruling class, not a neutral arbiter standing above social conflict. I have viewed this idea as corollary to both historical materialism and the concept of class struggle, but the issue of where to place what principle does not significantly affect the outcome of the argument. It is important to add, however, that the paradigm is, itself, rooted in specifically Marxist traditions and concepts. Other models of radicalism, I suggested earlier, would have other sources and precedents. The present model is thus limited in its application to movements which do, in fact, look to the parameters of Marxist thought for their intellectual grounding.

The second part of the methodology was to apply the paradigm to the over-all political practice of the American Communist party in the 1930's. My conclusion was that, after the Presidential election of 1936, the Party leadership continually jettisoned more and more of the ideological and organizational principles which, according to the paradigm, will mark a movement as radical. Thus, prior to the election, while the Communists made clear they were not actively supporting Roosevelt, but only opposing Landon, they nevertheless retained an openly class struggle component in their own programs and campaigns. Working people soundly repudiated radical ideas at the polls, voting in record numbers for Roosevelt.

Immediately thereafter, key elements of a radical philosophy disappear from the Party's over-all publicly expressed program. I want briefly to review the history here.

First, the Communists begin to downplay the importance to action of a mass political movement, one which is independent from the parties of capitalism. Communists try to get as close to the Democratic party

as they can. They are even instructed, in certain jurisdictions, to register as Democrats, in order to be able to affect the outcome of primaries. The argument that workers cannot attain the full recognition of their interests within the framework of capitalism is put aside. The New Deal is not supported merely as a program of limited reform, while agitation to push beyond the constraints of capitalism continues. Rather, the Party comes to give unequivocal support to Roosevelt's policies, even as it grants that these policies are designed to shore up and save a society based on production for profit. No taint of ideological opposition to the New Deal is permitted. Next, the legitimacy of force and violence henceforth goes unmentioned. Fourthly, working-class internationalism becomes dissolved in an amorphous cultural movement, with an almost total emphasis on the traditions, stories, songs, and dances of the common people. The relation of all this to an international political movement based on class, rather than ethnicity, is left implicit. Meanwhile, the Party is trying to present Communism as 'Twentieth Century Americanism', and to identify itself with the history and symbols of American nationalism.

Finally, in the early months of 1938, the Party drops the only institutional structures it has for maintaining itself as an organized political vanguard. The Party's fractions and caucuses within progressive and liberal groups were discarded. Its members' ability to fight for a coherent and independent program as communists within unions, political associations, or mass pressure groups, was thus destroyed. They had either to surrender their identity to the larger organization of which they were part, follow cues handed down by those in contact with Party leadership, or find ways to manipulate behind the scenes as

individuals. None of these alternatives is compatible with the notion of radical struggle as it is defined in the controlling theoretical paradigm.

It might be that, in the inner circles of Party organization, and deep within the hearts and minds of individual Communists, radical intent was sustained. The Party faithful still held to the notions, perhaps, that mass organization independent of capitalist parties was essential, capital and labor were fundamentally opposed, violent overthrow was an acceptable mode for dealing with the capitalist state, workers could end their exploitation only if they identified themselves politically with their class, not their nation, and local vanguard activism was a necessary prerequisite for change of consciousness at the base of the working-class community. But if one is concerned to assess the character of an oppositionist movement's politics, one must look at its public behavior. For any efforts to challenge fundamentally the values, norms, and institutions of the present must take place in such ways that a population can see and hear them, argue over them, think about them. Only then is there the possibility that members of disadvantaged social segments will come, out of independent and autonomous conviction, to want to transform radical conceptions into policy, and be willing, finally, to engage in the conflict such choices precipitate.

There is no other way to win people to alternative systems of ideology and practice. If the key concepts of a radical paradigm are not present to action, do not serve as background to programmatic struggles for reform, do not frame the specific policy decisions and compromises made necessary by existing circumstance, then an oppositionist movement, whether in or out of power, and no matter its protestations, must be

characterized as expressive of a deradicalized, or reform, politics.

It is my suggestion that any contemporary Marxist movement is open to assessment in these terms. Variations will be necessary depending upon whether the Party in question has taken control of the state, or whether it competes within the framework of a liberal, parliamentary system; whether, where it has come to power, it has done so through constitutional or insurrectionist means; whether the economy of its society is backward or industrially developed; whether its nation was once under direct colonial rule. But the presence or absence of ideological struggle is a constant which has relevance wherever there are movements which seek, as political ends, the elimination of capitalist modes of production, displacement of the individualist philosophy of classical liberalism, and development of a polity based upon equality of condition and public ownership of productive wealth.

I have come to the conclusion of the argument regarding the American Communist party. A radical Marxism, I contend, requires for its realization the presence of an ideological platform based on the concepts of historical materialism and class struggle. Under this notion, the American Communist party became deradicalized during the latter half of the nineteen-thirties. It became deradicalized not because it supported reform policies or worked in coalition with reformist groups. It became deradicalized because it abandoned the struggle for a system of ideas that openly and consistently opposed the assumptions and values of the capitalist order.

The dissertation does not end here. For there are two conceptual issues to which I would like to devote some concluding analysis and discussion. They have been consistent themes throughout this work, but

they have not been given the somewhat fuller attention they still require. An adequate comprehension of the nature of radical practice, demands they be confronted and understood. The first is the dilemma posed by the notions of democratic centralism, organizational leadership, and vanguard party. Must these function in such a way that radical practice inherently leads to a politics of repression?

The second concept which I would like to extend is that of 'the quality of struggle'. Here, one returns to the idea of Stalinism as a particular, and brutalized, form of radical politics. I am not so much interested in dealing with a discussion of Stalinism per se, however, as I am with the question of the attributes of action for which one must strive in order to achieve an open and satisfying practice. The basic elements, here, I will argue, are consistency and flexibility. But first I turn to the problem of organization, party, and democracy in radical politics.

Organization and Democracy in Political Practice

The first principle of the radical paradigm--historical materialism--logically implies the necessity of concrete political organization in order to achieve social change. For history is first moved, according to this theory, not by individual leaders, or philosophical systems, but by changes in the technology of production, in the means by which food, clothing, and shelter are labored upon, and a social surplus created. The dominant political classes draw their ability to prevail from organizing control of those productive forces, and using the concepts of order, state, and law to ensure that, whatever wealth which technology and labor create, falls, as a fundamental social right, to them, to dispose of as

they see fit.

This, in Marxist terms, at any rate, is the notion of property. The right of property, of private ownership of the means of productive wealth, gives to those fortunate--or ruthless--enough to gain possession of those rights, control over the means of livelihood of everyone else in the society. They come together to rule as an organized political-economic force; the point, therefore, is that social force must be opposed by social force. For change to occur, writes Ralph Miliband, in summary of this notion, "there must be organization:

against the vast array of powerful forces which the ruling class is able to deploy in the waging of class struggle, the working class and its allies cannot hope to succeed unless they are organized.¹

Thus, a central theme of radical thought has been the nature of political organization, its internal structure, and the character of its relation to the working class as a whole.

It seems almost intuitively obvious that the form of organization in which a radical movement must seek to embody itself is a political party. For that is the social instrument through which groups, classes, and factions of classes, can win control of the mechanisms that centralize, and impose, social policy decisions on the body of the populace as a whole. A revolutionary party is different than a hegemonic party, of course, in that the first wants to overthrow the existing state structure, while the second takes it as a given.

The first function of a radical political party, therefore, is to seek control of the state apparatus, through whatever means it deems most feasible. The paradigm, the reader will recall, grants the legitimacy of coming to power through force and violence; however, at any point in

its career, a radical party can renounce such a strategy as counter-productive and outmoded in its own particular situation. Thus, starting in the 1890's, German social-democracy tabled the question of violence, and even Lenin and Luxemburg granted that, under certain types of circumstances, the working class might come to power through constitutional means. In such cases, the revolutionary party moves into the electoral arena, and participates, with the parties of order and reform, in the parliamentary process.

The direction of events forced development of a second function for the radical party. As the resistance of workers to socialist ideas became obvious, radical theorists began to define the party not only as an agency of political action, but as a socializing and educational agency as well. These concepts were given their first, rough expression in the work of Lenin and Luxemburg; they were refined and expanded by Antonio Gramsci, and constitute one of his major contributions towards a theory of practice. "One should stress the importance and significance which, in the modern world, political parties have in the elaboration and diffusion of conceptions of the world," he wrote in The Prison Notebooks,

because essentially what they do is to work out the ethics and the politics corresponding to these conceptions and act as it were as their historical 'laboratory'... The relation between theory and practice becomes even closer the more the conception is vitally and radically innovatory and opposed to old ways of thinking. For this reason one can say that the parties are the elaborators of new integral and totalitarian intelligentsias, and the crucibles where the unification of theory and practice, understood as a real historical process, takes place.²

The party becomes a testing ground, in which the ideas and values of the society to come are struggled over, and lived with, as people go through the business of their day-to-day relationships to one another.

Difficulties soon emerge for both these concepts of the party: the party as political agency, the party as socializing agency. And they are difficulties which can be traced directly back to Marx, although a case can be made that they are implicit in the concept of a vanguard organization. For it was Marx, although he was totally unaware of the second role the radical party would seek someday to play, who insisted that, among all the working-class parties which might come into existence, there was one which had special, unbiased knowledge of correct policy. Of course, it just happened to be the one he was attempting to help organize. "The Communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only," Marx and Engels informed the world in the Manifesto.

1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.³

There is arrogance, here, or, at best, a misreading of historical evidence, buttressed by a good deal of wishful thinking. It is one thing to argue that workers have a common and fundamental opposition to the interests of capital, interests not reconcilable within the framework of a given economic order. It is another to assert that the interests of workers are always and everywhere the same, and that it is possible to create an organization which has special insight into the kinds of policies best suited to realize these interests.

The capitalists have a common, over-riding interest in maintaining the institution of private ownership of productive wealth; yet, they

have differences among themselves based both on economic placement, and mere differences of opinion as to how best to keep the system in operation. The landlord, the merchant, the banker, the manufacturer, the trader in raw and wholesale goods: all are capitalists, with that single, unitary interest in keeping capitalism strong; but still, there are between them lesser interests, which, within the context of their common system, justify the setting up of various factions and parties.

The members of the capitalist and upper-middle classes also differ among themselves in regard to their understanding of how a market economy works; in regard to the extent of inequality they believe just and acceptable; in regard to their concepts of how best to promote stability in the face of class division and turmoil. These are differences over means and interpretation, not over basic values and philosophy. Different parties emerge reflecting this lower level of political difference. They are an essential component in strengthening the consensual foundation of the liberal state, and permitting to it, its quality of openness.

There is no historical evidence for asserting that the working class is any more a unified political entity than is the capitalist class. Labor would become "more and more equalized in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labor,"⁴ Marx and Engels prophesied, but it was no more than that, prophesy, and not a particularly accurate one. Commonality of long-term, over-arching political interest, combined with short-range, internal conflicts, and varying interpretations as to best means and most effective policy, are inherent in all politics, class based or not. The "'unity of the working class', which the party seeks or claims to embody," writes Ralph Miliband, "must be taken as an exceedingly dubious notion..." The concept may take on definite meaning

in special and unusual circumstances, Miliband continues, but, normally, it "obscures the permanent and intractable differences which exist in this as in any other social aggregate.

On this view, a united party of the working class, speaking with one voice, must be a distorting mirror of the class; and the greater the 'unity' the greater the distortion, which reaches its extreme form in the 'monolithic' party.⁵

There are no grounds for assuming that, in the case of the working class, some sort of unified political truth is available, and that, in some way, it justifies the suppression of legitimate differences over means, interpretation, strategy. The stifling of this sort of conflict can, in the long run, only destroy a movement's vitality.

On the other hand, political theorists cannot be too superior and disdainful in this matter. There are extenuating circumstances. And certainly, one can afford to be more leisurely about the organized expression of political difference when one firmly controls a system, than when one is either attempting to overthrow it, or to establish a new and shaky regime, surrounded by enemies. As Miliband writes, citing an old and familiar formula, "political parties of the working class are not debating societies." To succeed in struggle, some degree of unity is required.

A genuinely 'representative' party, in which all the divisions of the working class find full expression by way of faction and tendencies and endless debate may...find itself unable to cope with the very responsibilities which are the reason for its existence...⁶

A middle ground between the demands of representativeness, on the one hand, and effectiveness, on the other, is required. But we have no rules or principles for determining where that point of balance should reside, since, in its way, every revolutionary situation is different, and every

society confronts radical organization with a different configuration of forces. To rigidly insist upon full freedom of expression, no matter what the exigencies, is a priori, to renounce the possibility for revolutionary overthrow in those societies where change will occur only through insurrection. To rigidly insist that no differences are possible within the groups that make the revolution, is to rob the struggle, ipso-facto, of its integrity.

If the conflict between the need for unity and the need for argument were the only problem of practice associated with organization, the task would be difficult enough to resolve. But the matter is complicated by the fact that, within the movement itself, there are some who bring greater conceptual clarity than others. This is related to the question of pluralism, discussed above, but it functions in a slightly different area of activity. For one is speaking, in this case, not of the relation of party to class but of leader to constituent.

The concept that radical activism requires the input of educated and theoretically sophisticated leaders is, by now, a familiar one to readers of this study. Antonio Gramsci, in The Prison Notebooks, refined the somewhat primitive notions of Lenin and Luxemburg on this score. Let me recite the three levels of hierarchy into which Gramsci broke the radical political party. It will make discussion of the pitfalls of democratic centralism, a discussion shortly to follow, somewhat more precise. For a party to exist, Gramsci writes, three fundamental elements have to converge:

1. A mass element, composed of ordinary, average men, whose participation takes the form of discipline and loyalty, rather than any creative spirit or organizational ability. Without these the party would not exist, it is true, but it is also true that neither could it exist with these alone.

They are a force in so far as there is somebody to centralise, organise, and discipline them. In the absence of this cohesive force, they would scatter into an impotent diaspora and vanish into nothing...

2. The principle cohesive element, which centralises nationally and renders effective and powerful a complex of forces which left to themselves would count for little or nothing. This element is endowed with great cohesive, centralising and disciplinary powers; also--and indeed this is perhaps the basis for the others--with the power of innovation (innovation, be it understood, in a certain direction, according to certain lines of force, certain perspectives, even certain premises)...

3. An intermediate element, which articulates the first element with the second and maintains contact between them, not only physically, but also morally and intellectually...⁷

Intellectual leadership is represented by the second element; the rank and file activists, those in positions of leadership in the neighborhood, at the shop, by the third; the bulk of workers, the average men and women of the laboring classes, by the first. But the goal, here, is not for the second element to simply instruct the other levels of activism as to what tasks they should carry out; it is to recreate themselves out of these less original and less innovative human actors. The second element, says Gramsci,

should leave as its heritage a ferment from which it may be recreated. And where could this ferment better be formed and subsist than in the first and third elements, which, obviously, are nearest in character to the second. The activity of the second element towards creating this ferment is therefore fundamental... (T)he preparation of one's own successors is as important as what one does for victory.⁸

Gramsci makes explicit that the most crucial and essential responsibility of any radical leadership is to pass on its ability and skills to those who surround it. Since the key to such leadership is its innovative character, it is just the qualities of creativity, initiative, and intellectual independence which the 'cohesive element' seeks to develop

from inert and ordinary masses. The goal is to elicit, out of the being and consciousness of the common people, imagination, autonomy, and the willingness to challenge the world in profound and original ways.

The point, first, is to realize that the exercise of leadership, and its development in others, does not take place in a social vacuum, so to speak, haphazardly, at a street-corner meeting or during a demonstration or in someone's living-room, or at a bar after work. It can take place only in terms of carefully nurtured, stable, ongoing organization. In organization there are structured levels of responsibility, authority, accountability; there are structured modes of relationship and interaction, envired by the opportunity and challenge of informal social contact; there are institutionalized arenas for the development of program and policy; there is the possibility for the study and application, in a semi-controlled environment, of methods which enable membership to experience the creative, autonomous, yet disciplined sense of authentic participation in decision-making, on which an effective, genuine mass democracy is based. And these, I suggest, are precisely the elements out of which the original notion of democratic centralism was moulded.

The success of democratic centralism as a political/pedagogic frame for, 1) involving people in learning how to control their lives politically, and 2) as an instrument for stimulating, within them, hidden and unrecognized abilities at innovation and challenge, turns upon the validity of Gramsci's notions of leadership and leadership structure. But the historical record gives no reason to be sanguine, here. After all, what leadership has ever been disposed to develop a constituency so autonomous and innovative that it will dare to challenge the very

leadership which developed it? Yet, unless this principle of holding one's leaders and teachers accountable to their own values and norms is made the central theme of organizational practice, then the Leninist and Gramscian concept of democratic structure is bound to collapse in on itself, and yield a dessicated, mechanistic, manipulative form of action.

There is only one internal device which, conceptually, democratic centralism has for keeping leadership responsible; and that is the willingness of rank and file, and their middle-level representatives, to challenge, criticize, and confront authority. But, by definition, these masses begin as politically passive, accepting of the fundamental beliefs of the reigning hegemony. There exist within them undifferentiated and unexamined discontents and resentments, but not much more. They can only move from a reactive consciousness, therefore, to an innovative and active one, if given the proper direction, understanding, and provocation, by their own organic intellectuals and political leaders. But, at the same time, they must be educated to develop insights and points of view independently--to come to understanding without reliance on the goadings of leadership; and leadership must have a commitment to developing precisely that quality in their constituencies, even if it means losing some of them to other ideological positions and/or political groupings.

This is a tall order, and in contradiction to what political science has long understood about the workings of power. The problem for a theory of revolutionary practice, therefore, is to find ways of mitigating these dangers without sacrificing a movement's ability to raise the political consciousness of constituents, and/or without risk to the continued existence of recently established regimes.

I have tried, so far in this section, to isolate two dilemmas which radical practice faces in the matter of organizational structure and operation. The first is the tendency among many radical groups to define themselves as the sole, true interpreter of the 'real' interests of the working class at any particular time--as if the working class were a homogeneous social entity, without conflicting partial interests, and with no room for legitimate differences of opinion and opposing points of view. The second dilemma is the willingness of leadership to promote intellectual independence and autonomy of action in the rank and file--just so long as such independence does not interfere with what leadership wants its members to believe and decide. Let me add that I reject the assumption that these tendencies are a product of some sort of underlying and unchangeable human nature. My own theoretical contention is that they have to do with the exigencies of power in a world of scarcity. Nevertheless, they are real, and rooted deeply in the human condition. Are there any ways for countering them?

One does not rattle off answers to this kind of question as if they were easily and obviously available, as if it were simply that no one had been clever enough to think of them before, and there are a few smart people out there who, sooner or later, will come up with the missing pieces. Knowledge is built collectively by an interested intellectual community, which consistently probes for researchable questions and hypotheses; looks for laboratories relevant to the field of study, where projections may be tested against evidence; presents reliable and verifiable empirical findings; and, finally, shares those findings with its community, so they may be examined, criticized, and turned back into the field, to lead to further avenues of research. At this stage in our

understanding of the phenomena associated with political practice, we are still just looking for hunches and intuitions, guidelines and directions. And those are the most I can offer in the following paragraphs.

In relation to the issue of organizational practice, I have focused on two problematic areas. The first is the conflict between 'class and party', as Ralph Miliband phrases this question. The second is the conflict between the need, in the development of revolutionary consciousness, for both a strong, directive leadership, and an innovative, autonomous constituency. What Miliband writes of the first of these dilemmas is applicable to both: they reflect a dialectical tension which can never be wholly resolved. What can be achieved, he states,

is the attenuation of this tension; and the degree to which it is attenuated is a matter of crucial importance. But this requires severe and effective limitations on the powers of leaders, which is no small undertaking and which is itself dependent on the existence or the achievement of a cluster of favorable circumstances.

In societies in which a revolutionary movement has come to power, Miliband argues at a later point, a second element is required: "the creation of institutions independent from Party control."⁹

I would extend Miliband's contention, for, while there must indeed be 'severe and effective limitations on the power of leaders', the achievement of such is tied up with other, less tangible factors. First, there must be modes for keeping leaders, constituents, and program in congruence with the values which radical practice claims to represent. Holding people and institutions accountable to what they say they believe is the essence of democratic control in socialist organization, and it can be effective only if it operates in two directions. Neither leader or constituent must be free from criticism by the other--everyone is

vulnerable, every one is fallible, no one has special insight into truth. Radical organization can achieve its goals, in other words, only if leadership is prepared to accept that it has the same difficulties and conflicts as every other human being in dealing with the enticements of power, authority, office. The choices a leadership makes may pull it away from struggle; it may become more concerned with immediate advantage than with the battle for ideas; it may settle for mechanical conformity from constituents, rather than continue to seek behavioral change based on ideological transformation; it can easily develop a vested interest in position, at the expense of personal and organizational integrity. 'Organic intellectuals' will permit themselves to be held accountable, and rank and file will only bother reaching out to hold them accountable, if there is a self-recognition on the part of leadership that it is subject both to error in its judgments, and inconsistency in its actions, and must, therefore, be open to correction and criticism by the very individuals whom it is responsible to lead. No one must be granted exemption from the possibility of error and weakness; and especially must no such exemption be given those at the highest reaches of authority. For then the principle of accountability of leadership is distorted into a device by which those at the top can easily manipulate rank and file into turning against middle-level leadership, in order to draw attention from the character of their own performance, in order to rid themselves of independent critics, or in order to resolve policy and factional disputes through witch-hunts and expulsions.

To accept the notion of 'leader infallibility'--or 'infallibility of the masses', for that matter--is to ingest poison into a radical organizational system. It is the political equivalent of arsenic in the

organic world--except that, to this poison, one can build no immunities.

Of all the dilemmas faced by radical movements and revolutionary societies, those created by the distinctions between class and party, leadership and constituency, hierarchy and accountability are the most intractable and potentially destructive. I have examined these dilemmas from the point of view of trying to lay a groundwork for a theory of practice. A number of approaches have been discussed in this section, but there are no formulas or gimmicks by which to guarantee democratic participation in the workings of centralized political organization. An open give and take between leaders and constituents turns on a number of factors, including, I suspect, the cultural environment of organizational practice. But the most important factor of all is an intangible one: conscious commitment to a series of principles and values regarding the exercise of power. All those involved in a given radical movement, at whatever level of responsibility, must be prepared to do whatever is necessary to keep these principles functioning and vital.

There must, first, be structured limitations on the right of leadership to make and implement decisions. But constituency must act when the limitations are violated, otherwise, structure becomes false and empty. In themselves, formal structures of accountability are never enough. A second intangible is the valuing of autonomy and independence over the uncritical acceptance of direction. A radical leadership must visualize its fundamental task as developing critical intelligence, political consciousness, and a spirit of innovation among constituents. But constituents must fight to question decisions they do not understand, and to turn back decisions with which they disagree. They must stand

on principle, and risk expulsion, when it comes to policies which they feel violate the integrity of practice. Finally, as corollary to these first two values of democratic organization, there must be allowance, in revolutionary societies and mass coalition movements, for the independent structuring of distinct and separate political trends. Differences between radicals and radical groups as to means of achieving common goals, or as to interpretation of the most effective policies for resolving particular conflicts, must become an accepted feature of revolutionary life. At the same time, the vulnerable shoots of a new society and way of looking at the world must be protected.

I will return to some of these themes in the next section, when I examine another 'variable of practice': quality of struggle. Here, I will once again consider Stalinism as a mode of practice which tends to undermine whatever advance in consciousness might be fostered by open ideological struggle and meaningful program.

The Quality of Struggle

Ultimately, the quality of struggle has to do with the degree to which a socialist movement seeks to remain consistent with the values and concepts of desired social relationships that it cites as justification and original motivating force. In Chapter VII, I spoke of the quality of struggle as reflecting 'a spectrum of actions which can move from the mechanical to the innovative, the manipulative to the open, the rigid to the flexible'. Struggling for consistency with original values on the one hand, and a concern for openness and flexibility in daily action on the other, are, in socialist practice, simply different aspects of the same concept. I will explain.

Whether a revolution has been made or not, and whether force and repression have been invoked to keep that revolution in place, the goal of a consistent radical activism is to create conditions through which people will eventually choose for values of solidarity over ones of individual advancement, equality of condition over privilege, social responsibility over a narrowly based concern for self and one's own. But if there is to be room for choice, even under the constraints of a regime which has come to power by means of forceful overthrow, there must be acceptance of the legitimacy of ideological unsureness and questioning; there cannot be the expectation of full intellectual and practical agreement in every matter of theoretical and policy difference; nor can there be the assumption that, when decisions are made, the only proper response is uncritical and immediate obedience.

In different ways, and out of different concerns, both Gramsci, in The Modern Prince, and the English historian and activist E. P. Thompson, in his critique of the structuralist theory of Louis Althusser, address issues relevant to an understanding of the concept of the quality of struggle. Gramsci takes us back to the dangers inherent in democratic centralism, dangers which he recognized as a tremendous threat to the integrity of radical practice. "Since the division between rulers and ruled exists even within the same group," he wrote,

certain principles have to be fixed upon and strictly observed. For it is in this area that the most serious 'errors' take place, and that the most criminal weaknesses and the hardest to correct are revealed.

What Gramsci then centers upon is the way in which leadership, through the mechanisms of structure, the unquestioned assumption of its own rightness, and a distorted view of the idea of unity, can destroy the essential character of its own radical practice.

'Certain principles have to be fixed upon and strictly observed...'

For the essence of practice is ideological struggle; and the very notion of struggle is predicated on the assumption that all members of a transitional movement or society retain some degree of comfort and habituation with the values of the social order undergoing change and reconstruction. Revolutionary action demands, therefore, that, as a new order is being proposed and introduced, ambivalence, conflict, argument, a hesitant but consistent reasoning through of things, be expected, allowed, encouraged. But the tendency of those responsible for the rooting of new values and the expansion of innovative consciousness seems often to be in precisely the opposite direction. The belief is common, Gramsci writes,

that obedience must be automatic, once it is a question of the same group; and that not only must it come about without any demonstration of necessity or rationality being needed, but it must be unquestioning. (Some believe, and what is worse act in the belief, that obedience 'will come' without being solicited, without the path which has to be followed being pointed out.)... it is difficult to cure leaders...of...the conviction that a thing will be done because the leader considers is just and reasonable that it should be done: if it is not done, the blame is put on those who 'ought to have' etc....10

The quality of practice, the measure of a skilled and competent leadership, the ability to win trust and acceptance from desired constituencies, will turn on a movement's willingness to be open to attitudes and behaviors which reflect resistance to its world view, suspicion of its motives, testing of its integrity. If radical practice cannot live with these very human reactions to the claims of leadership and authority, it will squeeze from action the juices of organic social contact and exchange; it will desiccate the synthesizing process by which common men and women hear new ideas, incorporate them into consciousness, and begin to re-direct behavioral choice in terms of what those ideas imply.

E. P. Thompson writes from a profoundly different historical vantage point than Gramsci. Perhaps because he knows more of the twentieth century, he has declared direct and open war on what he argues is the attempt, in the work of Louis Althusser and his school, to elevate the rigidities of Stalinism into a coherent logical system. We can see the emergence of "althusserianism", Thompson argues, "as a manifestation of a general policy action within ideology, as the attempt to reconstruct Stalinism at the level of theory."¹¹

The validity of Thompson's charges against Althusser specifically, are not at issue here. Rather, it is the former's concern with the relation between theory, practice, and ideological choice which interests me. For one of Thompson's major contentions is that Althusser's structuralism, and, by direct inference, Stalinist practice, are such as to deny legitimacy to the open struggle over values in a revolutionary movement. But the degree of willingness to encounter ideological difference, I have argued throughout this study, is a defining component of the quality of struggle. "... (V)alues no less than material needs will always be a locus of contradiction, of struggle between alternative values and views of life," Thompson insists.

...Men and women argue about values, they choose between values, and in their choosing they adduce rational evidence and interrogate their own values by rational means... Conflicts of value, and choices of value, always take place. When a person joins or crosses a picket line, that person is making a choice of values, even if the terms of the choice and some part of what that person chooses with are socially and culturally determined.¹²

Thompson views consciousness as a dynamic, self-creating source of energy and human choice, capable of reacting in an infinite variety of ways to the social alternatives which face it. But according to the assumptions of structuralist thought, the configuration of mental and physical attri-

butes we call a person is totally determined by its surrounding web of external relations. "I can only suppose, from certain references of theoretical practitioners to 'moralism'," Thompson continues,

that these imagine a moral choice, or a choice between values, to be a kind of grunt, and a grunt which is the reflex of 'ideology'... (I)n so far as the full disclosure of choices between values is inhibited, in so far as the articulate "discourse of the proof" is actively suppressed, so any value-informed view of life will rot away into rhetoric and hypocritical moralistic oratory. This is, exactly, the case with Stalinism... The Soviet repressive and ideological State apparatuses, in inhibiting any open argument about values, have not only denied to "individuals" the right of "self-expression", they have denied to Soviet society the means to express, and to examine, itself.¹³

The analysis which Thompson makes of the nature of Stalinism, here, is similar to the frame of argument which I presented in the second chapter of this dissertation. Stalinism chokes off the very innovation and search for active control of one's world which defines the radical enterprise itself. This 'closure of conflict' as one might call it, is precisely one of the key factors which vitiates political struggle, and gives to it a deradicalized quality.

The purpose of this concluding chapter has been to explicate some of the basic issues which an over-all theory of practice must confront as it attempts to answer the question of how a radical movement must use itself in the struggle to transform consciousness. The quality of struggle, the most elusive of the variables of practice, has to do with two factors in this effort. The first I will call the factor of consistency. The second I will describe as openness or flexibility. I have cited the passages from Gramsci and Thompson as ways of giving some sense of substance to these notions. Stalinism, I might add, is deficient in both these characteristics.

Consistency has to do with the extent to which an activism is able to maintain congruence with the original goals and values that inspired it. Clearly, a movement founded upon the importance of involvement, autonomy, and independence in regard to collective human decision, which then insists that the highest level of authority are always right, and their interpretations never subject to challenge, only 'clarification', leaves something to be desired in the way of consistency. Another example of divergence between principle and practice might occur in a movement which, founded on notions of social equality, nevertheless, as soon as it is stabilized, frees leadership from accountability, accuses it to deferential treatment, and grants it special position and privilege.

If it is to retain its integrity, which is the first component of an acceptable quality to practice, a radical organization must constantly ask what it means, operationally, to act consciously in relation to a value system. What institutional practices and procedures exist for keeping actions and relationships within the parameters of philosophical principle? What can people do, to put the issue in less refined fashion, to keep each other honest? How do we prevent the ends of action from collapsing into their opposite? I offer no fixed and final answers to such questions; I am saying, however, that an effective and penetrating quality to practice depends upon the attempt always to confront and deal with them.

The second factor which defines the quality of struggle is precisely a movement's openness to difference and conflict. For the social and political choices which people make are not simply mechanical responses to material conditions, and to ideological proddings by the forces

of accepted authority. The socially structured self, as it grows and develops under the collective institutions of particular time and place, has, as complement, an internal, autonomous center of consciousness, which unfolds in parallel moment. It is capable, when so motivated, of choosing for or against the very institutions which formed it. But it must see reasons why it should do so. Conviction cannot be coerced, or created through the manipulation of external circumstance. Practice will simply not engage the intellect and social energies of the great masses of working men and women unless it expects and encourages conflict over the nature, meaning, and direction of perceptions, choices, values. It is the function of a theory of practice to find ways of incorporating such conflict into the day to day living of radical organization.

I have offered, over these concluding pages, an outline of some of the issues to which, I believe, any radical activism must address itself in its efforts to extend consciousness, transform social relationships, and broaden people's ability to control the conditions of their lives. My purpose was to take the analysis of the American Communist party, made in the body of the dissertation, and develop from it some suggestions for pursuing inquiry into the matter of how one goes about laying a basis for fundamental social change. In the final section of this work, I want to return briefly to the issue of American Communist practice in the 1930's, and relate it to the theoretical framework presented in this chapter.

- 3 -

I have tried to make the argument, generally, that, if radical

practice is to be judged, among other things, by the extent to which it grounds political and social action in ideological projection and ideological struggle, then there can be no question that, towards the latter half of the decade of the thirties--specifically, after Roosevelt's massive re-election in 1936--the American Communist party became deradicalized. I have also argued, however, that an effective radicalism turns on more than just the clarity and intensity of ideological articulation. For, as I indicated in the opening chapter, the issue of radicalism is a complex one, made up of many strands that twist round one another in intricate ways. One must examine an activist movement not only in terms of the relation of program to ideology, but in terms of its organizational functioning, and of the extent to which its daily involvements with its world reflect both consistency between principle and action, and flexibility in dealing with criticism and disagreement.

In none of these areas, other than program, does the record of the American Communist party stand out particularly well. While they clearly articulated and projected the basics of the radical paradigm during the Third Period, this was done, up until 1933, at least, in language and style copied directly from Comintern texts. It was totally unsuited to the perspective and political frame of reference of American workers. Program, however, was generally meaningful and effective in the sense that, much of what the Communists fought for in the Third Period became eventually realized, in one form or another, in the program demands of the C.I.O. It should also be pointed out that, on the line, at the point of direct contact, the Communist organizer knew how to put aside Comintern jargon, and talk to American workers in language they understood.

The major weakness of Communist program in these years was its

tendency to tie all of its agitation--whether for free food for children of the unemployed, or for a national program of unemployment insurance--to defense of the Soviet Union, and to the call for an immediate setting up of a workers' state in America. However, it is only fair to remember that, in the context of the times, these issues may not have seemed as outlandish as they do today. Besides, by 1933 they began to be mitigated somewhat, and Communist program to come more into line with ideas to which American workers could more fully respond. After 1936, of course, the Communist program was indistinguishable from that of the Democratic party.

In regard to the question of organizational practice, a fully realized radicalism demands the presence of two factors, neither of which is a condition for the salience of the other. The first is that, in order for there to be both a coherent ideological articulation, and the controlled implementation of program, there must be separate organization, in the form of distinct political structures, accountable to none of the political institutions of the dominant social order. The Communists, again up until the second half of the nineteen-thirties, satisfied this criterion. However, they could not, given their identification with an international movement under Stalinist leadership, ever come close to meeting the requirements of the second factor. For radical practice demands not only independently based organization. There must also be democratic accountability, and authentic membership participation in policy-making at all levels, as opposed to rote examination, rote discussion, and rote approval of what has already been decided. While democratic involvement may have occurred, if only in limited ways, among many local activists and groups, genuine challenge to higher leadership was ruled out as a matter of fundamental philosophy. After 1936, of

course, even the independently based organizational structures of the Party began to disappear. Whatever autonomous Party structure did remain, continued to operate out of a rigid and inflexible centralism.

In the matter of the quality of struggle, the Party, with all its limitations, fared best in the 1933-1936 period. Here, left somewhat to its own devices by the Comintern, as Soviet leadership tried to figure out what had gone wrong in the Third Period, and to come up with a new strategy for meeting the threat of Fascism, the American party showed its greatest flexibility and openness in reaching out to American workers and the American labor movement. During these years, as well, it is possible that the Party showed the greatest consistency between principle and practice in regard to the values of democratic structure.

It is unfair to say, as does James Weinstein, that "despite its many accomplishments, the history of the Communist Party provides only negative lessons."¹⁴ The matter is much too complex to be formulated that way. The Communists were crippled by their entrapment in notions of structural determinism and Party infallibility. They chose to ignore or rationalize away uncomfortable facts, rather than risk a break with the Third International. They uncritically accepted leadership and direction from the Soviet Union, thus compromising their stated commitment to reason and intellectual independence. But on more minute, immediate levels of social contact and political action, levels no less significant, to say the least, than the grand ones of unified national program, and resolute participation in international revolutionary movement, there is much indeed to learn from how the Communists functioned. If there were not, if they were ineffective in their struggles in the arena of

daily life, they would not have become the formidable presence they were in the American progressive movement from the nineteen-thirties up until the end of World War II. Indeed, one might say that the most important attribute of the American Communists is the one which has been studied least: they knew how to organize. John L. Lewis, once their mortal enemy, looked to them, and invited them into the campaigns of the C.I.O. in 1935, because, to put it simply, he knew that, in terms of influence and numbers, they were the most effective organizers of the time.

The Communists' recognition of the necessity of organization, structural accountability, and program; their readiness to limit individual self-indulgence for the sake of political action; their understanding, most clearly evident at the points of close and direct involvement with workplace and community constituents, that one must be sensitive to existing levels of consciousness among workers--these are all characteristics to which a contemporary American radicalism needs to look with much greater seriousness. It is my contention, in fact, that one of the first places to which a rigorously attempted theory of practice must turn, is not the haute-politique of the Communist bureaucracy, but the day-to-day, door-to-door, grinding routine carried out by the Communist rank and file in the shop, street, and neighborhood. Such researches began in the 1970's, in works like the Lynds' Rank and File, Nell Painter's study of Hosea Hudson, James Barrett's and Rob Ruck's taped interviews with Steve Nelson, and Roger Keeran's history of the Communist party in the auto workers unions.¹⁵ One need not agree with the perspectives and approaches of any of these authors to recognize the importance of their concerns and findings. For it is the study of Communist political practice at its juncture with the everyday lives

of working people, that has the most to teach us of the nature of radical organizing.

After all is said and done, the answer as to how one manages to develop knowledge in the matter of moving towards a socialist society is not all that complex: if one believes answers can be found, one simply keeps searching for ways to find them. They may remain unconfirmed or undiscovered--in which case nothing is lost. On the other hand, one may begin to build towards new insight and understanding into the character of collective life. In any event, it is too early to assume, at this point in man's development, that a viable socialist society is not possible. Thompson puts the issue this way: Socialism, as well as any future made by men and women, he writes, "rests not only upon 'science', or upon the determinations of necessity, but also upon choices of values, and the struggles to give these values effect."¹⁶ Humanity has never accepted the non-existence of a tool, a mechanism, an institution, a way of life as evidence that methods and inventions could not be found to bring valued ends into being. One simply keeps striving for deeper knowledge of the relevant factors.

There is no other way of going about it.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER TEN

¹Ralph Miliband, Marxism and Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 118.

²Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, edited and translated by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 335.

³Marx and Engels, Selected Works, 3 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969) "The Communist Manifesto", 1:120.

⁴Ibid., p. 116.

⁵Miliband, p. 127.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Gramsci, pp. 152-153.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Miliband, pp. 148-149; 150.

¹⁰Gramsci, p. 145.

¹¹E. P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), p. 131.

¹²Ibid., p. 175.

¹³Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁴James Weinstein, Ambiguous Legacy (New York: Franklin Watts, 1978), p. 168.

¹⁵All of these works have been cited in the text.

¹⁶Thompson, p. 196.

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